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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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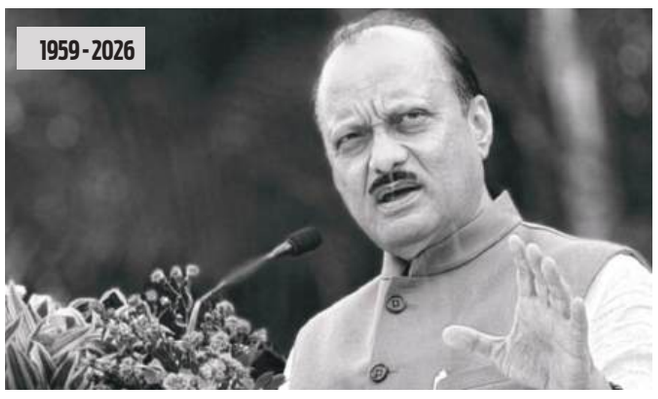
M'rashtra DyCM Ajit Pawar killed in plane crash

Ajit was enroute to Baramati from Mumbai where the plane crashed due to 'low visibility'



BARAMATI, 28 JAN

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and four others on board a chartered aircraft were killed after it crashed near Baramati airport in Pune district on Wednesday

The 66-year-old leader's death has created a political vacuum in the BJP-led state coalition and cast uncertainty over the future of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which he headed.

Ajit had departed from Mumbai in the morning to address four rallies in Pune district ahead of the 5 February Zilla Parishad elections. In a twist of fate, the Baramati-born leader, who built his political career from the constituency, died at the same place. He was scheduled to hold four public meetings here.

His death comes days before the elections, in which he had decided to tie up with the NCP (SP), ditching the Mahayuti alliance of the BJP and Shiv Sena.

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) has taken over the probe. The aircraft's "black box", comprising the Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorder, will be analysed to determine the cause of the crash.

The Learjet, a 16-year-old aircraft operated by VSR Ventures Pvt Ltd, was reduced to ashes, with debris scattered near the runway following a massive blaze. Those killed included Captain Sumit Kapoor, co-pilot Capt Shambhavi Pathak, Personal Security Officer Vidip Jadhav and flight attendant Pinky Mali.

According to the Civil Aviation Ministry, the jet attempted a second landing after a go-around due to poor visibility.

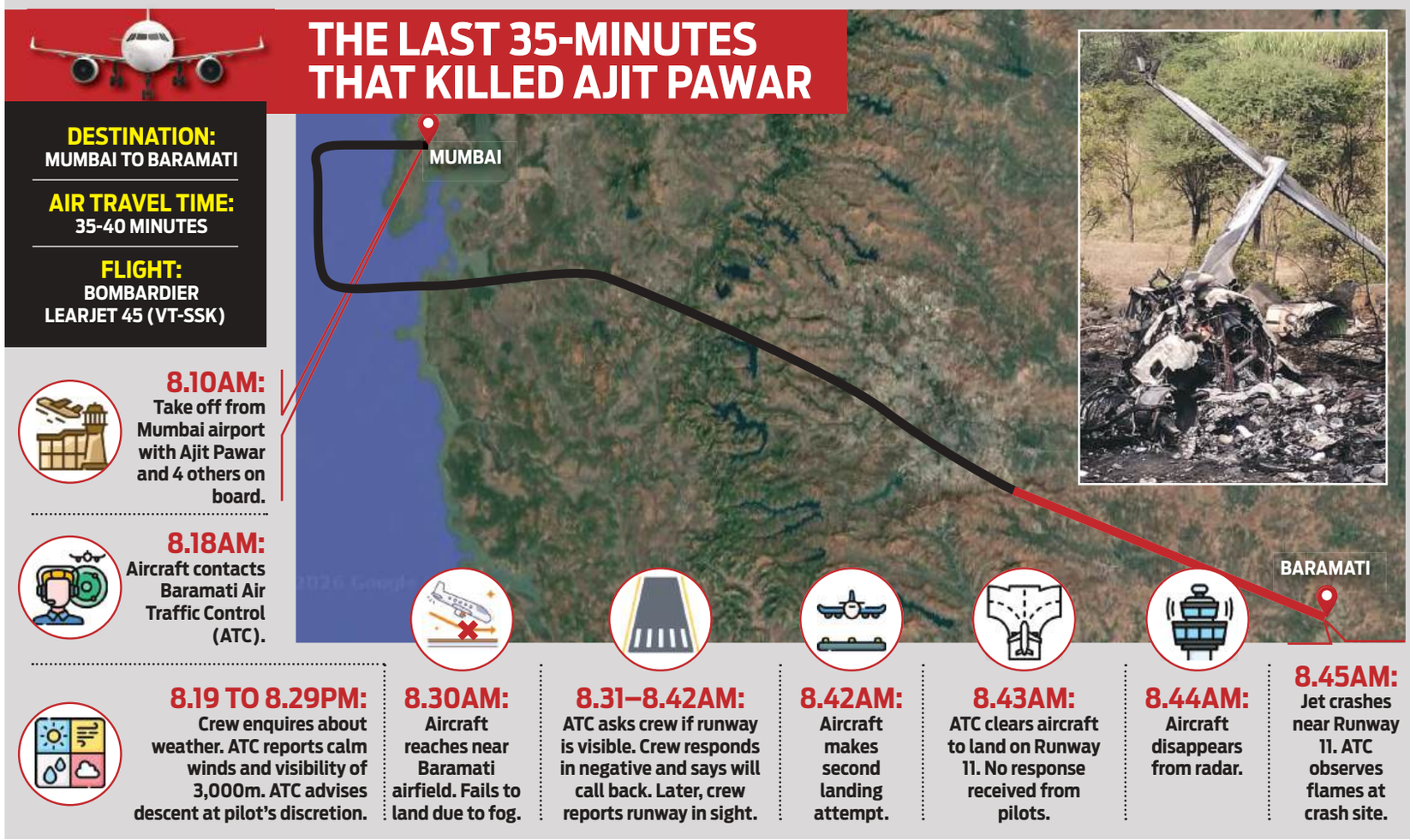
It will probe why despite reported visibility of 3,000m and calm weather, the crew struggled to maintain visual contact with the runway.

Eyewitnesses reported the aircraft appeared unstable, tilted sharply and lost control at about 100 feet before crashing and exploding multiple times.

Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu said the investigation would be conducted "in a transparent and accountable manner".

Ajit is survived by his wife Sunetra, a Rajya Sabha member, and sons Parth and Jay. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2, 3 & 5


THE LAST 35-MINUTES THAT KILLED AJIT PAWAR
DESTINATION: MUMBAI TO BARAMATI
AIR TRAVEL TIME: 35-40 MINUTES
FLIGHT: BOMBARDIER LEARJET 45 (VT-SSK)
MUMBAI
BARAMATI
8.10AM: Take off from Mumbai airport with Ajit Pawar and 4 others on board.
8.18AM: Aircraft contacts Baramati Air Traffic Control (ATC).
8.19 TO 8.29PM: Crew enquires about weather. ATC reports calm winds and visibility of 3,000m. ATC advises descent at pilot's discretion.
8.30AM: Aircraft reaches near Baramati airfield. Fails to land due to fog.
8.31–8.42AM: ATC asks crew if runway is visible. Crew responds in negative and says will call back. Later, crew reports runway in sight.
8.42AM: Aircraft makes second landing attempt.
8.43AM: ATC clears aircraft to land on Runway 11. No response received from pilots.
8.44AM: Aircraft disappears from radar.
8.45AM: Jet crashes near Runway 11. ATC observes flames at crash site.

GRAPHICS: G VISHWANATHA

Crashed Learjet had an accident in 2023 too

The aircraft involved in Wednesday's crash had earlier met with an accident in 2023. In September 2023, the Learjet 45XR skidded off the runway while landing at Mumbai airport amid heavy rain and poor visibility. "It was raining, visibility was low, and the aircraft skidded after landing," VSR Aviation captain VK Singh had said. —*Agencies*

MOMENTS BEFORE DEATH

The last picture of Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar before take off —*PTI*

Funeral with full State honours on 29 Jan at 11am in Baramati's Vidya Pratishthan.

M'rashtra govt announces 3-day state mourning.

"The way the plane was coming down, we felt it was going to crash. It was around 100 feet above the runway. As we rushed towards it, we saw flames, followed by four to five consecutive blasts —Eyewitness

PHOTO: X

Ranveer booked for Kantara Daiva mimicry in B'luru

BENGALURU, 28 JAN

Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh has been booked in Bengaluru for allegedly hurting Hindu religious sentiments by mimicking the Daiva scene from Rishab Shetty's 'Kantara' at the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) on 28 November, 2025. A city-based advocate filed an FIR under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 196, 299 and 302, accusing Singh of mocking the sacred Chavundi, Panjurli and Guliga Daiva traditions. Singh had later apologised on social media, while Shetty said the Daiva element is sacred and should not be performed or mocked on stage. —*Salar News*

Murmu cites Macaulay's 'conspiracies' in Parl speech

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said that "Macaulay's conspiracies" during the colonial era instilled a sense of inferiority among Indians. She asserted that for the first time since Independence, the government has shown the courage to strike at this legacy.

Addressing a joint sitting of Parliament at the start of the Budget Session, the President referred to the renewed national debate over the "Macaulay mindset", reignited in November 2025 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a 10-year pledge to decolonise the Indian psyche.

She said this was done as the sacred Piprahwa relics of Bhagwan Buddha, excavated in 1898 and held abroad for 125 years, have been repatriated and are now on public display in Delhi.

She also recalled that 2026 marks 75 years since the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple, describing its history as a symbol of India's enduring faith, and noted the millennium celebrations of Rajendra Chola's Gangaikonda-Cholapuram as a source of national pride.

PTI

The President said India had been a centre of ancient learning, but much of its manuscript heritage was lost due to invasions and post-Independence neglect. Murmu invoked Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Atal Vajpayee to seek unity on national issues

Opposition protests during the address drew sharp criticism from the government, with Union minister JP Nadda demanding an apology. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

What more did the President say?

- 4 cr pucca houses built for poor in last decade.
- 2.5 cr got free treatment last year under Ayushman Bharat.
- Citizens' income has increased.
- India will witness complete eradication of Maoist terror.
- GST 2.0 saved Rs 1 lakh cr as govt on 'reforms express' path.

MUDA CASE

In relief to CM, court accepts Lokayukta closure report

BENGALURU, 28 JAN

In a relief to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, a Special Court for Public Representatives on Wednesday accepted the closure report by Lokayukta police, giving a clean chit to him and his wife, Parvathi, in the MUDA land allotment case. The court also exonerated Siddaramaiah's brother-in-law Mallikarjuna Swamy and the original landowner J Devaraj.

The court was hearing a petition by activist Snehamayi Krishna challenging the Lokayukta police's "B Report." While Siddaramaiah and others were cleared, the court allowed further investigation against other accused and fixed the next hearing for 9 February.

Special Court judge Santosh Gajanan Bhat emphasised that the probe was not entirely closed, stating that the Investigating Officer shall continue the investigation against other accused and file the final report upon completion. The judge also rejected the complainant's plea seeking contempt proceedings against the Investigating Officer.

On the role of central agencies, the court noted that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has the right to intervene as aggrieved parties, but only to a limited extent. Lokayukta Police in February last year had given a clean chit to Siddaramaiah, Parvathi, and two other accused in connection with the case, stating that allegations against them have not been proven due to lack of evidence. The case relates to 14 compensatory MUDA sites allegedly allotted to Parvathi in an upmarket Mysuru area under a 50:50 scheme, following acquisition of 3.16 acres of her land. It was alleged that Siddaramaiah used political influence in the allotment, and that Parvathi had no legal title over it. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

- The case relates to 14 compensatory MUDA sites allegedly allotted to Parvathi in an upmarket Mysuru area under a 50:50 scheme, following acquisition of 3.16 acres of her land.

BJP accuses Karnataka govt of phone tapping

Karnataka Assembly witnessed chaos on Wednesday as the BJP accused the Congress government of tapping phones at Lok Bhavan. The controversy followed Minister HK Patil's claim that Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot was receiving calls from Delhi and acting under instructions from the Centre.

BJP MLAs labelled the Siddaramaiah-led government a "phone tapping government" and questioned how Ministers accessed information on calls to the Governor and Lok Bhavan. The issue arose during the debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address to the joint sitting of the state legislature.

Siddaramaiah denied that the government was tapping phones as alleged by the opposition. The row traces back to 22 January, when the Governor refused to read the state-prepared address and walking out of Assembly. —*PTI*

UPPER CASTE CONVERTING TO BUDDHISM

Minority certificate to Hindus 'a fraud': SC

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

Supreme Court on Wednesday voiced concern over a "new type of fraud" involving individuals from dominant upper-caste backgrounds in Haryana converting to Buddhism solely to claim minority reservation benefits.

The top court sought a report from the chief secretary of Haryana as to how minority certificates are being granted and issued in the state.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was hearing a petition filed by one Nikhil Kumar Punia, a resident of Hisar in Haryana, who was seeking admission as a minority candidate on the basis of his claimed Buddhist faith.

During the hearing, the CJI, who also hails from same place, questioned Punia's social background.

"You are a Punia? What minority are you? Let me ask this bluntly now. Which Punia are you," the CJI asked.

When counsel for the petitioner said he is from Jaat Punia community and had converted to Buddhism, reacting sharply the CJI exclaimed, "Wow! This is a new type of fraud."

The bench asked the chief secretary of Haryana to inform about the guidelines for issuing a minority certificate.

The bench, which dismissed the plea of Punia, kept it for further consideration on the issue of procedures adopted in granting minority certificates after the state government submits its response. —*PTI*

Priyank accuses Guv of getting RSS' calls

BJP MLA Sunil Kumar questions whether the govt is tapping Lok Bhavan phones

BENGALURU, 28 JAN

IT and BT Minister Priyank Kharge in Assembly alleged that Thawarchand Gehlot was receiving calls from Keshava Krupa, the RSS Karnataka State Headquarters.

Speaking during a heated debate on the motion of thanks on Wednesday, Priyank defended Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil, who had earlier claimed the Governor was acting as a "puppet" under instructions from Delhi.

The remarks triggered a furious response from the BJP.

MLA Suresh Kumar accused the Congress government of making baseless allegations against the Governor, pointing out that in the past, Governors — including Hansraj Bhardwaj in 2011 — had tabled their speeches without reading them fully, following opposition requests.

BJP MLA Sunil Kumar questioned whether the government was tapping Lok Bhavan phones, saying, "How can this be tolerated? This is the second time the law minister has implied it."

"The Law Minister has repeatedly said that the Governor was getting a call from Delhi. How did they know? if they have records, let them place it in the House."

Priyank's maintained that Patil's comments were aimed solely at highlighting Central government interference, not confirming any phone tapping.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka —MOHAMMED ASAD

However, BJP members insisted on clarification, with Sunil Kumar and Leader of Opposition R Ashoka alleging both Priyank and Patil could be involved in monitoring the Governor's communications.

The row intensified when BJP members sarcastically claimed Congress officials were receiving calls from Italy in retaliation.

Patil countered that neither the Governor nor the Centre had issued any clarification on alleged communications, asking, "What is the Home Ministry doing? Should they not at least issue a press note?" The exchange led to chaotic scenes in the House, with opposition and treasury benches trading heated accusations over phone tapping. Ashoka warned, "Are our phones also being tapped? This is a phone tapping government."

With tensions running high and no resolution in sight, Speaker UT Khader adjourned the House for lunch. —*PTI*

- The remarks triggered a furious response from the BJP. MLA Suresh Kumar accused the Congress government of making baseless allegations against the Governor, pointing out that in the past, Governors — including Hansraj Bhardwaj in 2011 — had tabled their speeches without reading them fully, following opposition requests.

Teen held for torching house in Uttara Kannada

KARWAR, 28 JAN

An 18-year-old has been taken into custody for allegedly setting fire to a house in Devarahakkala village, Kumta taluk, Uttara Kannada district, police reported on Wednesday. The incident occurred while the family, who own the property, were away attending an annual temple fair. The accused, Faisan Jaffer Shaikh, is said to have taken advantage of their absence to ignite the home of a resident named Dinakar. Neighbours spotted the blaze and, with the help of other villagers, managed to control the fire before it caused extensive damage. Police promptly rushed to the scene with additional personnel. An investigation is underway to determine the motive behind the alleged arson, and formal arrest procedures are yet to be completed. —*PTI*

Rangsons, Exide to employ 600 GTTC students

BENGALURU, 28 JAN

Rangsons Aerospace, an aerospace manufacturing company and Exide Energy, a battery manufacturer on Wednesday signed separate memorandums of understanding with the Government Tool Room and Training Centre (GTTC) to recruit its students. While Rangsons Aerospace will recruit 200 diploma students Exide Energy will employ 400 students. The MoUs were signed at the GTTC campus in Rajajinagar here during its Alumni Meet. Rangsons Aerospace, said GTTC graduates fit seamlessly into job roles with minimal additional training. Subhash Srinivas, head, manufacturing engineering, Exide Energy, said the company was keen on hiring freshers with skill training in mechanical engineering, high-end automation, electronics and electrical streams. —*PTI*

SPOKEN IN COASTAL DISTRICTS

Open to making Tulu 2nd official language: Culture Minister

BENGALURU, 28 JAN

Minister of Kannada & Culture **Shivraj Tangadagi** on Wednesday told the Legislative Assembly that the Karnataka government is in favour of declaring Tulu as the state's second additional official language.

He said the government is studying the measures adopted by West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, both of which have additional official languages.

The Minister was responding to a question by Puttur Congress MLA Ashok Kumar Rai during Question Hour.

Tulu is predominantly spoken in the coastal districts of Udupi and Dakshina Kannada, and legislators across party lines from these regions, including Speaker UT Khader, have been demanding that the government declare it as the state's second additional official language.

At present, Kannada is the state's only official language, while English is also used for official purposes as an additional language.

He added that once the report is submitted, a meeting involving the Speaker, district in-charge ministers, and legislators from Tulu-speaking districts will be convened with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. "I want to assure you that we are in favour of this," he said.

Earlier, noting that several states have two or three additional official languages, Rai demanded that Tulu be declared an official language at the earliest, stating that it would not impose any financial burden on the government.

"Tulu has a history of 3,000 years, has its own script, and is included in Google Translate. The language is being researched in Germany and France, and universities have allowed examinations in Tulu," Rai said. —*PTI*

Tejasvi flags issues in land transport clause

BENGALURU, 28 JAN

Submitting the formal objections to the Draft Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA) rules, 2025, BJP MP **Tejasvi Surya** on Wednesday sought the removal of savings clause from it citing the ruling Congress government's move to 'retrospectively rubber stamp' the Rs 1 Lakh cr Tunnel Road project.

The BJP Bengaluru South MP said the draft BMLTA rules, notified in the Karnataka Gazette on 3 January, 2026, introduced a savings clause under Rule 24 that "exempts previously announced large-scale infrastructure projects from requiring approval of the BMLTA, thereby potentially allowing proposals such as the Tunnel Road project to be deemed approved without institutional scrutiny."

Expressing serious concern over the provision, Surya stated in a post on X: "This (Rule 24 savings clause) is nothing but a dangerous attempt by the Congress-led state government to retrospectively rubber stamp the Tunnel Road project and other works to the tune of Rs 1 lakh crore.

WIKIPEDIA

Developmental works are indeed essential for the progress of Bengaluru but the BMLTA rules cannot be a tool to bypass scrutiny and erase accountability," Surya said.

"These rules are also illegal since subordinate legislation cannot override the principal act. Through these rules, the Congress attempts to prematurely kill the act - the primary reason for our opposition to it," he added.

On 3 January, the Urban Development Department released draft rules to govern the BMLTA, laying out detailed procedures for its composition, conduct of meetings, financial management and audit mechanisms.

Citizens have been given 30 days to submit objections and suggestions. —*PTI*

TEACHERS PROTEST

Members of Karnataka State Special Teachers and Non Teaching Staffs Association demand for full financial assistance to them as per Supreme Court order among other demands during their protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Wednesday —MOHAMMED ASAD

36 escape as sleeper bus catches fire in Shivamogga

SHIVAMOGGA, 28 JAN

Thirty-six passengers narrowly escaped serious harm after a private sleeper bus caught fire late Tuesday night in Shivamogga district, leaving six people injured, police said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred at Arasalu-Suduru in Hosanagar taluk when the bus, travelling from Hosanagar to Bengaluru via Shivamogga, developed smoke in the driver's cabin. Police said the driver panicked after noticing the smoke, lost control of the vehicle and rammed into a roadside tree.

As flames spread, passengers evacuated the bus through an emergency exit, preventing further casualties. "All passengers are safe. Six, including the driver, sustained injuries, some minor, others severe. They are receiving treatment," a senior police officer said.

Local residents and passing motorists rushed to the spot and helped rescue passengers before the fire engulfed the vehicle. The bus was completely gutted.

Officials from Ripponpet police station visited the scene, registered a case and began preliminary inquiries. Police said an investigation is underway, and the Regional Transport Office has been directed to submit a detailed report to ascertain the cause of the fire. —*PTI*

'AGHAST' DKS ADVICES CAUTION TO POLITICIANS WHILE TRAVELLING

BENGALURU, 28 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday expressed shock over the death of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and NCP Chief Ajit Pawar in a plane crashin Baramati, calling it a "huge loss" and urging politicians to exercise greater caution while travelling.

Speaking to reporters here, Shivakumar said Pawar's death was disturbing and recalled the loss of several leaders in similar incidents. "Ajit Pawar's death is shocking... We as politicians should be very careful," he said.

Remembering Ajit Pawar as a progressive leader, Shivakumar said Pawar had earned confidence of the people cutting across party lines and noted his personal ties to Bengaluru.

Shivakumar,however, declined to comment on Pawar's past political decisions and said it was premature to speculate on the cause of the crash without any official report on it.

> **May his soul rest in peace, and may his loved ones find the strength to endure this irreparable loss**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah called Pawar's demise a "profound loss to public life" and said, "May his soul rest in peace."

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy, BJP President BY Vijayendra, former CM BS Yediyurappa and Opposition Leader R Ashoka also expressed condolences. —*Agencies*

Sewage water enters Mysuru's Lingambudhi lake; probe on

MYSURU, 28 JAN

Locals have registered a series of complaint regarding the sewage water from residential areas of Dattagalli, Kanakadasa nagar allegedly flowing into the Lingambudhi lake through the storm water drain.

Residents told Salar News that a few of the pipelines connected to the lake were broken, letting the sewage water enter and pollute the lake. They also reported about foul smell coming from the pipelines.

A pile of plastic waste were reportedly clogging the storm water drain.

The polluted lake was also affecting the residents of the area as well as the passers-by and animals nearby.

Following the complaints, a team of Mysuru corporation and forest department officials led by Chamundeshwari MLA GT Devegowda, on Wednesday conducted a spot investigation of the sites.

Devegowda directed for an immediate repair of the damaged pipes to stop the flow of sewage water.

He also ordered the officials to clear any debris that were around the pipelines.

The MLA urged the team to take measure to prevent entering of plastic waste into the lake. —*Salar News*

A few of the pipelines connected to the lake were broken, letting the sewage water enter and pollute the Lingambudhi lake —ANI

Software firm reports Rs 87 cr data breach

BENGALURU, 28 JAN

Bengaluru Police have registered a case following an alleged data theft worth approximately Rs 87 crore after a leading software company accused a former employee of illegally transferring sensitive source code and proprietary data.

The FIR, filed by Amadeus Software Labs India at Whitefield CEN Crime Police Station (Crime No. 0050/2026), names ex-Senior Manager Ashutosh Nigam.

According to the complaint, Nigam, who worked as a Senior Manager – Research Scientist, allegedly ex filtrated highly confidential source code and data on 11 October, 2025 via his personal email without authorisation. The company became suspicious during questioing and reportedly obtained a video-recorded confession from him. —*ANI*

TRANSMITTED VIA TICKS

Monkey fever kills 1 in Shivamogga

SHIVAMOGGA, 28 JAN

A 24-year-old man from Thirthahalli taluk in Shivamogga district has died of a suspected case of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) or monkey fever, triggering fresh concern in Karnataka's Malnad region.

KFD is a viral haemorrhagic fever, caused by a virus belonging to the Flaviviridae family. The virus is transmitted to humans through the bite of ticks. The disease in endemic to southwestern India.

The man, a resident of a plantation area near Kattehakku, died while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Mangaluru on Wednesday.

This is the first suspected KFD-related death to be reported in the State this year, though laboratory test results are awaited. The patient had been reportedly unwell for nearly a week and was initially admitted to a private hospital in Thirthahalli.

As his condition worsened, he was referred to Mangaluru for advanced care.

Shivamogga deputy commissioner Prabhuling Kavalikatti said that the health authorities have been asked to step up surveillance, preventive measures and medical preparedness in areas bordering forests.

Meanwhile, Uttara Kannada district health officer Neeraj BV said KFD cases are typically recorded during the summer months. However, less rainfall in 2025 and a more intense summer this year may have contributed to its increased severity.

"Most of the affected persons live in hamlets located deep inside forest areas. Several such hamlets in Uttara Kannada, many of which lack proper transportation facilities, are being covered by medical personnel for treatment and monitoring," he said. The tick-borne disease claimed nine lives and infected 100 others in Uttara Kannada in 2025.

The Health Department has advised people who enter forest areas for livelihood activities to apply tick-repellent oil to prevent tick bites. —*Salar News*

Mysuru Zoo's oldest giraffe 'Yuvaraja' dies at 25

MYSURU, 28 JAN

A 25-year-old male giraffe, which was one of the major attractions of the Mysuru Zoo, died due to old-age ailments on Wednesday.

Staff members of the zoo found the giraffe, Yuvaraja dead in his enclosure in the morning.

The giraffe was born on 7 December, 2001. Its parents, Henry and Honey were the giraffes, which were brought from Germany during in 1987 and had seen been housed at the Mysuru Zoo. Yuvaraja was raised by keepers of the Zoo after his birth. He was the longest living giraffe of the zoo till date.

Henry and Honey were also the parents of three other giraffes - Krishnaraja, Chamaraja and Narasimharaja.

Yuvaraja was the last calf born to them, the Executive Director of Chamaraja Zoological Gardens of Mysuru said in a statement.

DEER STRAYS INTO CHAMARAJANAGAR HOME

A deer wandered off the woods in search of food and strayed into a house in Bommalapura in Gundlupet town in Chamarajanagar district.

The deer, which strayed into the house of Rajesh on the night of 27 November, created panic after striking an elderly woman and injuring her on the legs.

The residents of the house locked up the deer, aged between three to four years, in their house and alerted the forest department officials. Officers of the Gundlupet buffer zone forest soon arrived at the spot and rescued the deer. The animal was later released into the woods at Kundukere range in Bandipur Tiger Reserve. —*Salar News*

AJIT'S PLANE LOST CONTROL, CAUGHT FIRE, THEN EXPLODED: EYEWITNESSES

The plane erupted into flames after the crash, which was followed by four to five blasts

Clockwise from left: People gather to pay their respects to late Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar; NCP leader Supriya Sule is inconsolable; Wreckage of the chartered plane; Ajit's wife Sunetra Pawar, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis mourn his demise in Baramati, Pune, on Wednesday —PTI

MUMBAI, 28 JAN

The ill-fated aircraft carrying Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, lovingly called "Dada", appeared "a bit unstable in the air" and exploded the moment it crashed on the ground near Baramati in Pune district on Wednesday morning, according to a woman eyewitness.

Another person who witnessed the incident said that after the crash, the aircraft burst into flames, followed by four to five consecutive blasts.

Pawar, 66, and four other people were killed after their aircraft crash-landed at the Baramati airport at 8.50 am, as per officials.

A local woman resident said she noticed the aircraft as it circled the Baramati airport in the morning.

"It took a round in the air, appeared a bit unstable and as it was approaching the runway to land, it hit the ground hard and exploded. There was a loud sound and could be heard at our home," the woman told a news channel.

- The plane appeared unstable when it took a round in the air, an eyewitness said. Another said that it tilted before landing. Officials said that the pilots flagged low visibility at the airport, and were operating under standard procedures

She said several parts of the aircraft were hurled into the air after the explosion and fell near her house. "The plane tilted before coming down. We saw the explosion and it was frightening," she said.

Another eyewitness also said the aircraft appeared to be losing control as it descended.

"The way the plane was coming down, we felt it was going to crash. It was around 100 feet above the runway. As we rushed towards it, we saw flames, followed by four to five consecutive blasts, which prevented us from going anywhere near the aircraft," he told reporters.

"It was a major fire. We later learned that Pawar was on the aircraft. It was shocking for us," he added.

Another eyewitness, Pramod Madurikar, said the bodies were identified immediately after the crash and shifted to an ambulance, while fire brigade personnel reached the spot almost simultaneously to assist with rescue and emergency operations. —PTI

"

'Ajit dada' made big contributions in the development of Maharashtra and India, especially in uplifting rural lives

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

His passing is a personal loss not only for the NDA family but also for me

-Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

He was not someone who held a grudge for long. Even though he chose a different path in politics, he did not let our relationship break

-Uddhav Thackeray, former CM and Shiv Sena (UBT) chief

I am feeling as if I have lost my elder brother... We (Ajit and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis) worked as a team... Whenever a concept came up, he would force everyone to think: how long would it last, and who would it benefit?

-Eknath Shinde, Maharashtra co-Deputy Chief Minister

Fadnavis and Ajit's ties soured recently

As Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis rushed to the scene and expressed condolences about his Deputy Ajit Pawar's tragic passing, it is worth noting that the ties between the two had soured recently over the civic polls.

"We have adhered to our promises. However, Ajit Pawar has not fulfilled his. I am unsure why," Fadnavis said on 14 January as Ajit indicated that his NCP would contest the local polls with Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP), breaking away from the Mahayuti alliance.

Fadnavis accused Ajit of slandering the BJP. "Ajit dada only speaks, but my work speaks," Fadnavis had lashed out.

"There will be no alliances here (in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad). We will refrain from speaking against anyone or engaging in slander," Fadnavis had added. Despite the harsh criticism, Fadnavis said that they agreed to a "friendly contest". However, on Wednesday, Fadnavis said that he lost a good friend.

Ajit's assets

According to the 2025 affidavit filed with the Election Commission, Pawar declared total assets worth around Rs 124 crore, alongside liabilities of approximately Rs 21.39 crore. His wife, Sunetra Pawar had total assets of around Rs 127.6 crore.

'WON'T GROUND FLEET'

Plane was well-maintained, says firm owner

MUMBAI, 28 JAN

VK Singh, owner of VSR Ventures whose aircraft carrying Maharashtra DyCM Ajit Pawar, said on Wednesday that the pilot apparently could not see the runway and carried out a "missed approach", a standardised procedure in such cases.

The ill-fated aircraft was "very well-maintained", and its pilot, Captain Sumit Kapoor, was a very seasoned and experienced pilot who had clocked 16,000 flying hours, he told reporters.

Captain Kapoor was an "instructor and examiner material" and had worked with Sahara Airlines, Jetlite and Jet Airways in the past, Singh said, adding that he had experience of flying the Learjet 45. Kapoor's son also works in his company.

Co-pilot Captain Shambhavi Pathak, who was among the deceased, was like a daughter to him, said Singh. Pathak had 1,500 hours of flying experience. Both Kapoor and Pathak were Delhi-based, he said.

"Primarily it appears that the pilot could not see the runway and that is why he would have carried out a missed approach. The pilot will carry out a missed approach in case he is not comfortable to land," Singh said.

When asked whether the remaining Learjet 45 aircraft in the company's fleet will be grounded, Singh said they were in good condition and there was no need to ground them. The Learjet 45 aircraft are very dependable, he added.

According to the website of Delhi-based VSR Aviation (owned by VSR Ventures), it caters to corporate travelers and others who need to fly to remote locations not serviced by commercial airlines. —PTI

All about the Learjet 45 that crashed

The Learjet 45 that crashed was manufactured by Bombardier Aerospace. It is registered under the Delhi-based VSR Ventures.

- Seating capacity: 6-8 people.
- The twin engine aircraft was first introduced in 1990s and first entered service in 1998.
- Length: 17.68 m
- Wingspan: 14.58 m
- Height: 4.30 m
- VSR's fleet included 7 Learjet 45 aircrafts (including the one involved in the crash), 5 Embraer 135BJ aircrafts, 5 King Air B200 aircrafts and 1 Pilatus PC-12 aircraft.
- The Learjet 45 is known as the "limousine of the skies".

'Lack of instrument landing system may have caused crash'

MUMBAI, 28 JAN

Experts said that the crash could have been averted if the airport runway had been equipped with an instrument landing system to guide the pilot through marginal visibility, according to an aviation expert.

There is a need to ensure that all evidence at the crash site is preserved and not tampered with, as they will be crucial for the probe, which is being carried out by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), they said, adding that the exact cause of the accident can only be known after the investigation is completed.

"Baramati airport has a small field runway, but it is sufficient for (aircraft like) Learjet to land. I do not think that the runway would contribute to this crash, as it happened before or outside the runway," retired pilot Ehsan Khalid said. "(But) yes, if the runway was equipped with ILS (instrument landing system) or other instrument systems that would guide the pilot properly during marginal visibility conditions, this (the crash) could have been avoided."

The reported visibility was "marginal", which means neither very good nor bad, and it was not so bad that it would have called for a diversion, he said.

Baramati airfield does not have an ILS, he said.

In case of poor visibility, the pilot and aircraft have to navigate through eye contact with the runway, Khalid added. —PTI

Remains of the charter plane at the crash site in Baramati —ANI

The dangers of a 'table-top' airport

The Baramati Airport where pilot of the ill-fated Learjet with Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar onboard tried to land the plane on Wednesday has been declared as a table-top airport by the DGCA. The plane lost control and crashed as it tried to land on the 1,770 meters long runway located level. For pilots it is tricky to land plane on a table-top airport as it often creates optical illusions that make the strip look closer than it actually is. India has five such airports, including one in Mangaluru.

Will talk tomorrow: Flight attendant told father

MUMBAI, 28 JAN

His voice filled with emotion and his eyes welling up, a distraught Shivkumar Mali said his daughter, **Pinky Mali**, a flight attendant aboard the plane, had promised to speak to him "tomorrow".

"Papa, I am flying to Baramati tomorrow (Wednesday) with DyCM Ajit Pawar. After dropping him, I will go to Nanded and will speak to you once I reach the hotel," Shivkumar, a resident of Prabhadevi in Central Mumbai, said.

Pinky had flown with the President, chief ministers and several political leaders, Shivkumar said, adding that she was flying with Ajit for the fourth time.

The father, who is also an activist of the NCP that Ajit headed, said a local politician named informed him about the crash. They had last met on 16 January.

Pinky had been working as a flight attendant for the last five years.

She started with Air India and moved to private chartered flights after a couple of years, he said. —PTI

25-yr-old co-pilot's mom was planning a wedding

GWALIOR, 28 JAN

A pall of grief hung over the Safdarjung Enclave home of Captain Shambhavi Pathak on Wednesday, curtains drawn and visitors moving in silence, as her family struggled to absorb news of her death in a plane crash in Maharashtra's Baramati earlier in the day.

At the southwest Delhi residence, her mother, a teacher at Air Force Bal Bharati School, was inconsolable, while her father, a retired Army pilot, left for Pune.

The couple, both in their late 40s, had been planning their daughter's marriage.

Her younger brother, around 22, serves in the Navy.

Neighbours recalled Pathak as gentle and bright. Shilpi, who runs a local beauty parlour, said Pathak was soft-spoken and deeply loved in the area.

A long-time security guard said she always greeted him with a namaste. Pathak joined VSR Ventures in 2022 as a first officer. Neighbours said the locality had never witnessed such sorrow. —PTI

IN PARLIAMENT

India-EU FTA to create new jobs for youth, says Murmu

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday welcomed the signing of a free trade agreement with the EU. Saying it will boost manufacturing, creating employment for the country's youth. She highlighted that over the past 11 years, India's economic foundation has strengthened. Despite global crises, the country has remained the fastest-growing economies.

Addressing both Houses of Parliament, Murmu said the government is advancing on the path of the 'Reforms Express', benefitting the poor and middle class. She noted the historic GST reform has saved citizens Rs 1 lakh crore and praised the revamped Income Tax law, which exempts income up to Rs 12 lakh from taxation.

The President's address was interrupted as opposition members protested the G RAM G Act. Leaders including Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge raised slogans, prompting Murmu to pause. Union Minister JP Nadda condemned the conduct, calling it "reprehensible". Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju accused opposition MPs of insulting national icons including Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr BR Ambedkar, Birsa Munda, Bhupen Hazarika, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.

Both Nadda and Rijiju slammed Congress, TMC, and allies, calling the disruption a disgrace to decorum and stating that the country would "never forgive" such behaviour. —PTI

Opposition to protest MGNREGA, SIR in Budget session

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

Opposition parties on Wednesday will raise MGNREGA repeal and SIR during the Budget session of Parliament despite the government's refusal to debate them.

Several INDIA bloc leaders met in the chamber of Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, to discuss the strategy, sources said.TMC and AAP leaders were absent from the meeting, also attended by former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi.

The leaders protested during the President's address and Motion of Thanks debate. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju to call it "a matter of shame". —PTI

Didi, Kharge demand SC probe into crash

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday called for a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the death of NCP leader Ajit Pawar. Several Opposition leaders, including Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, backed her demand.

Banerjee stressed that the truth would not emerge through existing mechanisms. "We trust only the Supreme Court. All other agencies have been completely compromised," she told reporters in Kolkata.

Banerjee also hinted that Ajit was reportedly planning to return to the Nationalist Congress Party faction led by his uncle Sharad Pawar.

"This incident shows that there is no safety or security in this country, even for political leaders," she said. "Even those who are a part of the ruling establishment today do not seem to be safe."

Kharge reiterated this: "In so many instances, we saw in Ahmedabad how a big plane crashed. This was a small plane; why did this happen?" Kharge said.

BJP lashed back and said there should be a Supreme Court probe into the Nazirabad fire on Kolkata's outskirts, which claimed eight lives on 26 January. —PTI

Crash an accident, don't bring politics into it: Sharad Pawar

PUNE, 28 JAN

In an apparent snub to West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, NCP (SP) President Sharad Pawar on Wednesday said the plane crash involving his nephew Ajit was an accident which shouldn't be politicised.

Addressing reporters, he said Ajit's death was a big shock for Maharashtra, which has lost a hardworking and efficient leader, and this loss is irreparable. "Not all things are in our hands," he added.

"A stand was floated from Kolkata that there is some politics involved in this incident. But there is nothing like this. There is no politics in it. It was an accident. I request not to bring politics into it," he added. —PTI

-ANI

Mamkootathil gets bail in sexual assault case

PATHANAMTHITTA, 28 JAN

A Kerala court on Wednesday granted bail to expelled Congress MLA Rahul Mamkootathil in the third sexual assault case registered against him, following his arrest earlier this month. The Pathanamthitta District Sessions Court allowed his appeal against a magistrate's court order that had denied bail, citing the seriousness of the allegations and his "similar antecedents". The case was filed under Sections 376 (rape) and 506(1) (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code on a complaint by a woman from Kottayam district on 8 January. Mamkootathil, the Palakkad MLA, was arrested on 11 January. Earlier, courts had protected him from arrest in two other sexual assault cases. —*PTI*

Molestation accused freed by cops: J'khand girl

RANCHI, 28 JAN

A minor girl in Jharkhand's Ranchi has alleged that police "deliberately" released three men accused of molesting her. The 16-year-old was allegedly molested on 19 January near a college in the Booti area. Her family filed a complaint on 22 January. Police said the accused were detained for questioning and later released as per legal provisions. A senior officer stated that they were served notices under Section 35(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and had been directed to cooperate with the investigation. A purported video showing the girl and her family urging police to make arrests has gone viral, though its authenticity could not be independently verified. The accused have been booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act, 2012. —*PTI*

Only 18 buses per lakh in TN's major cities: Study

CHENNAI, 28 JAN

Tamil Nadu's major cities run just 18 buses per lakh population, far below the Union urban affairs benchmark, says the 'Tamil Nadu Urban Mobility Charter 2031'. Prepared by the Sustainable Mobility Network, it flags heavy spending on vehicle-centric projects and declining public transport statewide. "In Chennai alone, 40 per cent of residents lack access to a bus stop within walking distance, while pedestrians account for 30-50 per cent of road fatalities in cities such as Chennai and Coimbatore. Air pollution remains a serious public health risk," it noted. "Modes that receive the least investment—walking, cycling, and public transport—account for 67 per cent of trips across the state," it added.—*PTI*

Dog guards owner's body for days amid storm in Himachal

SHIMLA, 28 JAN

A pet dog was found guarding its owner's body amid a snowstorm and freezing conditions in Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district, officials said on Wednesday. Two teenagers Viksit Rana, 19 of Gharer village and Piyush Kumar, 14 from Malkota went trekking on 23 January and went missing. Viksit, an avid vlogger, had taken his pet Pitbull, Sheru, along to shoot videos in the hills. A large search operation involving police, specialised mountaineering teams, locals and the Army was launched, with helicopters and drones used to scan dense forests and remote areas. After three days, rescuers located the bodies under snow and found the dog sitting beside Viksit's body. Piyush's body was recovered later.—*PTI*

SC appoints ex-judge to end TN temple dispute

120-yr-old fight is about 2 Vaishnava sect's ritual practices

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

The Supreme Court on Wednesday appointed former judge Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul as principal mediator to explore an amicable resolution to a 120-year-old dispute between two Sri Vaishnava sects over ritual practices at the Sri Devarajaswamy Temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was hearing an appeal against a Madras High Court ruling, which upheld the exclusive rights of the Thenkalai sect to perform Adhiapaka Mirasi (official ceremonial worship) at the temple. Recording the consent of both parties for mediation, the court said Justice Kaul may associate two additional persons of his choice well-versed in Tamil, Sanskrit, temple rituals and religious history.

The court said Justice Kaul may associate two additional persons of his choice well-versed in Tamil, Sanskrit, temple rituals —*WIKIPEDIA*

- A bench was hearing an appeal against a Madras High Court ruling, which upheld the exclusive rights of the Thenkalai sect to perform Adhiapaka Mirasi at the temple

Manipur panel gets extension

In a separate development, the apex court extended till 31 July the tenure of the Justice Gita Mittal committee appointed to oversee relief and rehabilitation of victims of ethnic violence in Manipur. The court was informed that the committee, constituted after the violence that erupted in May 2023, has submitted 42 reports so far and continues to monitor issues relating to displaced persons and rehabilitation.

SC to hear on UGC rules

The bench also agreed to list for hearing a plea challenging the University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026. The petition contends that the regulations adopt a narrow definition of caste-based discrimination by limiting it to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, thereby excluding members of the general category from institutional grievance redressal mechanisms.

Court says yes to AI crash plea

Further, the SC agreed to hear petitions seeking an independent, court-monitored probe into the 12 June Air India Boeing 787 crash from Ahmedabad, which killed 260 people. The pleas, filed by an NGO, a law student and the father of the deceased pilot, allege lapses in the official probe and seek a judicial inquiry into the accident. —*PTI*

GOVT REPORT SAYS 16

Indore witnesses 29th death due to contaminated water

INDORE, 28 JAN

The Bhagirathpura area witnessed another death on Tuesday, with the family alleging the victim died of diarrhoea caused by contaminated drinking water, prompting the High Court to order a judicial probe into the month-long health crisis.

Khubchand Bandhaiya, 62, was undergoing treatment for vomiting and diarrhoea, and his last rites were held on Wednesday. His son Rohit alleged that despite repeated requests, no ambulance was sent.

Residents claim 29 deaths since the outbreak began in late December. However, a death audit report submitted to the Indore bench said 16 of 23 audited deaths were possibly linked to the outbreak, four were unrelated and three inconclusive.

Taking note of multiple PILs, a division bench of Justices Vijay Kumar Shukla and Alok Awasthi termed the situation "alarming" and ordered an independent inquiry.

Justice Sushil Kumar Gupta was appointed a one-member commission and asked to submit an interim report within four weeks. Fifty-one tube wells found E. coli bacteria from sewage contamination confirmed. —*PTI*

The deceased Khubchand Bandhaiya's son Rohit alleged that despite repeated requests, no ambulance was sent —*PTI*

India on top: Trump govt on trade deal between Delhi, EU

NEW YORK, 28 JAN

India emerged on top in its newly sealed free trade agreement with the European Union, according to US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, marking the Trump administration's first public reaction to the deal.

Responding to a question on the pact, billed as the "mother of all deals", Greer told Fox Business on Tuesday, "I've looked at some of the details of the deal so far. I think India comes out on top on this, frankly. They get more market access into Europe."

He said the agreement appeared to include mobility benefits. "It sounds like they have some additional immigration rights. I don't know for sure, but President Ursula von der Leyen has talked about mobility for Indian workers into Europe. So I think on net, India is going to have a heyday with this. They have low-cost labour," Greer said.

Indian PM Narendra Modi with President of the European Council António Luís Santos da Costa and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, at Hyderabad House in New Delhi —*ANI*

Greer said the EU was "doubling down on globalisation" while the US was trying to "fix some of the problems of globalisation here in the US". He added that President Donald Trump's focus on domestic production and fees for accessing the US market was pushing trade-dependent economies to seek alternatives. "The EU is turning to India to try to find a place," he said.

On India's Russian oil purchases, Greer said Delhi pays a 25 per cent tariff. "They have a way to go... they like discount," he said. —*PTI*

Shankaracharya ends sit in protest after 10 days

PRAYAGRAJ, 28 JAN

Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati on Wednesday left the Magh Mela here "with a heavy heart". He ended his sit-in protest that began on 18 January after he was allegedly prevented from taking a holy dip at the Sangam.

Before departing the Mela grounds, the seer said his anguish was beyond words. "A dip at the Sangam brings inner fulfilment, but my mind is so distressed that I am leaving without bathing," he said.

The protest followed an incident on Mauni Amavasya when the Shankaracharya, travelling in a palanquin to Sangam, was asked by administrative and police officials to dismount and proceed on foot due to heavy crowds. Terming the directive a "humiliation" and an "attack on his dignity", he launched a sit-in on the banks of the Sangam.

Amid the controversy, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, without naming the seer, cautioned the public against "Kaalnemi", a demon from the Ramayana who disguised himself as a saint. In response, the Shankaracharya compared the Chief Minister to Mughal rulers Akbar and Aurangzeb, alleging he was a "temple-breaker" and unworthy of being called a Hindu.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav also criticised the ruling BJP, saying its "arrogance" had hurt Sanatan traditions. —*PTI*

Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati leaves from the ongoing 'Magh Mela' festival, in Prayagraj —*PTI*

26 schools across Chandigarh, Gurugram get bomb threat mails

CHANDIGARH/ GURUGRAM/ CHHATTISGARH, 28 JAN

Schools in Chandigarh and Gurugram and district courts in Chhattisgarh were placed on high alert on Wednesday after receiving bomb threat emails, prompting evacuations and security checks across the three regions.

As many as 26 government and private schools in Chandigarh received threat emails in the morning, leading to evacuation of students and staff and deployment of bomb disposal and sniffer dog squads.

An FIR has been registered at Sector 17 police station, and the cyber team is examining the Gmail account used to send the threats. Authorities advised schools and parents to remain calm.

In Gurugram, at least six private schools received threat emails at 7.10am. Campuses were evacuated and searched, with bomb squads, sniffer dogs. No suspicious objects have been found, officials said. Meanwhile, three district courts in Chhattisgarh, Rajnandgaon, Ambikapur and Jagdalpur, were evacuated after anonymous emails threatened explosions. —*PTI*

Hundreds stranded in Srinagar as snowfall shuts down NH

SRINAGAR, 28 JAN

Hundreds of tourists remained stranded in Kashmir for the second consecutive day on Wednesday after the Srinagar–Jammu National Highway, the only all-weather road link connecting the Valley with the rest of the country, was closed due to heavy snowfall.

Although the highway was partially reopened later in the day following a massive traffic jam, movement remained restricted, officials said. The closure left many travellers stuck, adding to their distress.

"I have been stranded for the last two days. We came to enjoy the snow, but it has become our punishment," said Kailash, a tourist from Rajasthan. He urged authorities to clear the road at the earliest, saying his family was anxiously waiting. He also complained of flight cancellations and soaring airfares, with tickets reportedly costing Rs 20,000–25,000.

A massive avalanche hit the tourist resort of Sonamarg in J&K on late Tuesday night, causing panic but no casualties were reported —*ANI*

Another tourist, Mohit Sharma, said the continued closure despite improved weather had caused significant hardship. "We are forced to spend beyond our budget and have nowhere to go," he said.

The snowfall on Tuesday also led to the suspension of flight operations in Srinagar, which resumed on Wednesday.

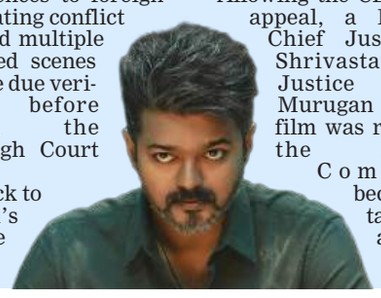
MADRAS HC FLAGS ARMY, FOREIGN POWER REFERENCES IN 'JANA NAYAGAN'

CHENNAI, 28 JAN

Caught in a certification row, actor Vijay's upcoming film 'Jana Nayagan' contains references to foreign powers creating conflict in India and multiple Army-related scenes that require due verification before screening, the Madras High Court has said.

In a setback to the film's release, the High Court on Tuesday set aside a single judge's order directing the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to grant a censor certificate.

Allowing the CBFC's writ appeal, a Bench of Chief Justice MM Shrivastava and Justice G Arul Murugan said the film was referred to the Revising Committee because certain visuals and dialogues showed foreign powers creating large-scale religious conflict that could "disturb religious harmony". The Bench also noted that the film contained "many Army related references" but no defence expert had been included.



The court said the issues raised were serious and justified the CBFC Chairperson's decision to seek review by a larger body. It held that the CBFC was not given adequate opportunity to file a counter affidavit. —*PTI*

Nabin slams TMC over infiltration, SIR row

DURGAPUR, 28 JAN

BJP President Nitin Nabin on Wednesday accused the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal of endangering national security by patronising infiltration and harassing voters during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, calling for a change of guard in the upcoming assembly elections.

Addressing a public meeting in Durgapur, his first visit after assuming charge, Nabin alleged a "deliberate attempt" to alter Bengal's demography and "turn Bengal into Bangladesh".

"While the Election Commission is determined to remove infiltrators and fake voters, the TMC government is trying to derail the SIR exercise through fear-mongering and misinformation," he said.

Claiming officials were acting as "puppets" of the ruling party, he warned them against serving a "temporary government".

Accusing the TMC of "jungle raj" and corruption, he alleged factories had shut while "companies of corruption" opened. He urged cadres to strengthen booths, asserting a "double-engine government" would deliver a developed Bengal. —*PTI*

12 CARCASSES RECOVERED

1,200 stray dogs have been killed in Telangana: Activists

HYDERABAD, 28 JAN

Nearly 100 stray dogs were allegedly killed in Thimmaipally village in Nagarkurnool district of Telangana, taking the Statewide toll to 1,200 since December 2025, animal rights activists claimed.

Police said an FIR has been registered against three persons, including the son of the village sarpanch, in connection with the latest incident.

Animal welfare activist M Preethi, in a complaint, alleged the dogs were killed around 10 days ago using poisonous injections after dog killers were hired for Rs 18,000, and the carcasses buried about two kilometres from the village. She accused the sarpanch and the gram panchayat secretary of orchestrating the act.

A Charakonda police official said a case was filed under relevant sections of the BNS and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, and that carcasses of 12 dogs have been recovered so far.

Separately, activist A Goutham alleged illegal capture and relocation of 50 stray dogs. —*PTI*

Tharoor stays silent on CPI(M) leanings

THIRU'PURAM/NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has declined to comment on reports suggesting he may move to the CPI(M), calling the claims speculative.

On Monday, Tharoor said he had seen media reports alleging discussions with individuals linked to the Left party in Dubai but chose not to respond. Speculation suggested Lulu Group chairman Yusuff Ali was mediating talks, a claim Ali denied. Reports further said Tharoor was upset over being overlooked by Rahul Gandhi during a Kochi visit. Speaking in New Delhi on Tuesday, Tharoor said he would convey his views directly to the Congress leadership and clarified his absence from a meeting at Sonia Gandhi's residence was due to an invitation. —*PTI*

Maharashtra top post eluded Ajit Pawar after 6 stints as DyCM

● Ajit Pawar had apparently reuinited with his uncle NCP (SP) and supremo Sharad Pawar and cousin MP Supriya Sule to contest civic polls together

Always the bridesmaid, never the bride. Ajit Pawar's career graph fit perfectly into the idiom of regret and lost opportunities. The death of Maharashtra's deputy chief minister for a record six times left his dream of becoming the chief minister unrealised, underscoring the narrative of 'could have been but never could'.

The 66-year-old grassroots politician known for his administrative acumen was killed in an air crash in his home turf Baramati in Pune district on Wednesday morning.

A seasoned politician, Ajit never hid his desire to become the state's CM. Before joining the BJP and Shiv Sena alliance government in July 2023, he was deputy CM when Devendra Fadnavis was the CM in November 2019, their government lasting barely two days.

Pawar was known to be a workaholic, and was famous for his punctuality, unlike many politicians notorious for their tardiness.

He had the record of becoming the deputy chief minister in several governments, led by the Congress, Shiv Sena and BJP.

His political career was marked by twists and turns, and he was always the survivor, be it the alleged Rs 70,000 crore irrigation scam or the recent controversy over his son Parth's land deal in Pune.

Affectionately called ''Dada'' (elder brother), Ajit was known to speak his mind and did not mince words while expressing his view especially before a rural audience.

In 2013, Ajit stirred up a hornet's nest with comments ridiculing the acute water and power shortage in parts of the state. He was forced to issue a public apology after his remarks came in for all-round criticism.

Addressing a public meeting in a village in Pune's Indapur, he had mocked Bhaiyya Deshmukh, a farmer from a drought-hit area in Solapur who was on a hunger strike at Mumbai's Azad Maidan, demanding more water.

"He has been fasting for the last 55 days. If there is no water in the dam, how can we release it? Should we urinate into it? If there is no water to drink, even urination is not possible," he had said.

Referring to the load shedding situation in parts of the state, he had said, "I have noticed that more children are being born since the lights go off at night. There is no other work left then."

In July 2023, he stepped out of his uncle and NCP founder's Sharad Pawar's shadow by rebelling against him and walking away with most of the party's MLAs, along with the party's name and symbol.

After a setback in last year's Lok Sabha election where his party won only one seat, he outwitted critics by bagging 41 seats in the assembly polls five months later, in alliance with the BJP. The NCP(SP) got only 10 seats.

Since the 2024 assembly results, Ajit Pawar fortified his position in state politics.

Despite his alliance with BJP and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, he stressed that he had joined the ruling alliance for development and had not deviated from his core progressive ideology.

He stayed focussed on his party and his ministries while political speculation centred around the so-called one-upmanship between chief minister Devendra Fadnavis and the other deputy CM Eknath Shinde.

Born on 22 July, 1959 to Asha and Anantrao Pawar, Ajit Pawar followed the footsteps of his uncle (his father;s younger brother) Sharad Pawar into politics in 1982 when he was elected to the board of a sugar factory.

In 1991, he was elected to the Lok Sabha from Baramati and later vacated the seat for his uncle who then became defence minister in P V Narasimha Rao's government.

Ajit Pawar then served as Baramati MLA for eight terms from 1991.

Ahead of the 2024 assembly elections in Maharashtra, Ajit Pawar appeared to be using colour psychology to rebrand himself as 'dada' (big brother) to the state's women voters. There was pink everywhere in his campaign – from social media posts and event banners to the jackets he wore and song videos about the Ladki Bahin scheme focussed on women.

Ajit Pawar, who was the finance and planning minister, would have tabled his budget for 2026-27 next month when the state legislature's budget session begins in Mumbai on February 23.

In the days to come, the focus will be on the future of the NCP factions, with political circles buzzing with the possible merger of the two outfits. —*PTI*

HEAVYWEIGHTS WHO DIED IN AIR CRASHES

Maharashtra DyCM Ajit Pawar's death with four others brought back the memories of other major crashes where heavyweights lost their lives. Here is a look at them:

Homi Bhabha (1966)

India's pioneering nuclear physicist Homi Jehangir Bhabha died in a tragic crash aboard Air India Flight 101 on 24 January, 1966. The plane crashed into Mont Blanc in the Swiss Alps due to a miscommunication with the Geneva air traffic control.

Sanjay Gandhi (1980)

Congress leader and son of then prime minister Indira Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi died in a tragic crash on 23 June, 1980. Attempting aerial stunts in a Delhi Flying Club aircraft near the Safdarjung Airport, the plane lost control and crashed.

Madhavrao Scindia (2001)

Senior Congress leader Madhavrao Scindia, himself a former civil aviation minister, died on September 30, 2001 in a plane crash en route a political rally in Kanpur. The 10-seater private aircraft crashed due to poor weather conditions in Uttar Pradesh, killing all eight members aboard.

GMC Balayogi (2002)

Lok Sabha Speaker and Telugu Desam Party leader GMC Balayogi died in a chopper crash on 3 March, 2002, when a private helicopter carrying him from Bhimavaram in the West Godavari district crashed into a pond near Kaikalur in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh.

Cyprian Sangma (2004)

Meghalaya's Rural Development Minister Cyprian Sangma and nine others, who were heading from Guwahati to Shillong on a Pawan Hans helicopter, were killed when the chopper crashed near the Barapani lake, just 20 km from the state capital, on 22 September, 2004.

KS Sowmya (2004)

Famous South Indian actress KS Sowmya, popular as Soundarya, lost her life in an air crash on 17 April, 2004. The 'Sooryavansham' actress was flying from Bengaluru to Karimnagar with her brother at the time of the crash.

OP Jindal and Surender Singh (2005)

Industrialist and Haryana minister Om Prakash Jindal lost his life in a helicopter crash in 2005 along with Agriculture Minister Surender Singh. Their chopper was en route Chandigarh from Delhi when it crashed in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur.

YS Rajasekhara Reddy (2009)

Then chief minister of Andhra Pradesh YS Rajasekhara Reddy, popularly known as YSR, died on 2 September, 2009, when his Bell 430 helicopter crashed in the dense Nallamala forest due to bad weather.

Dorjee Khandu (2011)

Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Dorjee Khandu and four others were killed on 30 April, 2011, when a helicopter carrying them from Tawang to Itanagar crashed in the West Kameng district of the state.

General Bipin Rawat (2021)

India's first Chief of Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat, died in a helicopter crash on 8 December, 2021. The incident occurred near Coonoor in Tamil Nadu while he was en route from Sulur to Wellington with his wife and 11 others.

Vijay Rupani (2025)

Former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani died in a plane crash in Ahmedabad on 12 June, 2025. All but one of the 242 passengers and crew on board the Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner (AI171) and more than 20 persons, including MBBS students on the ground, were killed in the aircraft crash.

WHO IS THE REAL NCP NOW?

Ajit Pawar pictured with mother Ashatai, wife and Rajya Sabha MP Sunetra, elder son Parth (left), and younger son Jay (right). All eyes are now on Sunetra and Parth CREDIT: X

The tragic and untimely demise of Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar has not only left a vacuum in the BJP-led state coalition government, but also cast a shadow on the future of the NCP.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) is likely to face a leadership crisis now, as there is no clear second-in-command, say political observers.

As the 'clock' symbol lost its undisputed leader, questions loomed over the party's survival and its future equation with founder Sharad Pawar, whose Rajya Sabha tenure ends in April this year.

There has been speculation whether the NCP might reunite with the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP), especially as ties between the factions have softened in recent months. In 2024, the Election Commission of India ruled that Ajit's faction was the "real NCP" and had the right to the 'clock' symbol.

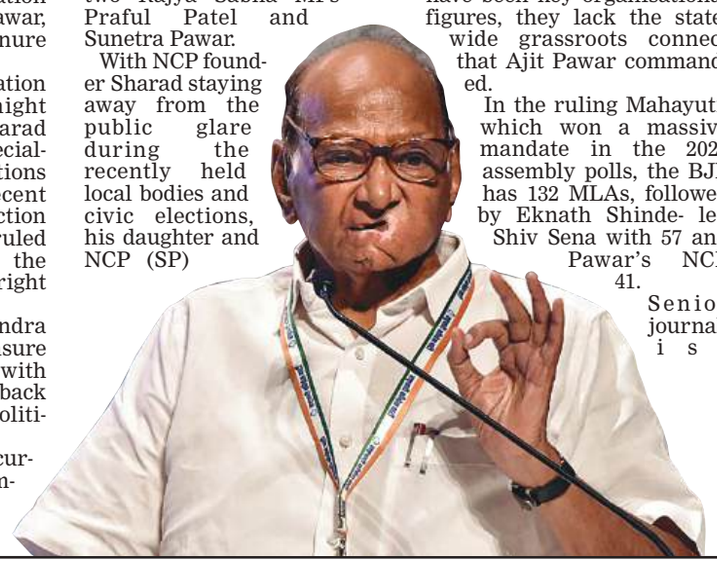
Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis will need to ensure that the 41 MLAs aligned with Ajit Pawar do not drift back toward Sharad Pawar, political analysts say.

Ajit's wife, Sunetra, is currently a Rajya Sabha member and has been politically active, though she lacks administrative experience. Ajit's eldest son, Parth Pawar briefly entered electoral politics in 2019 when he contested the Lok Sabha election from the Maval constituency. However, Parth lost the election by a wide margin, and the defeat marked the end of his political ambitions.

In 2025, Parth was embroiled in a massive land scam in Pune, and it remains unclear if he will return to politics.

The NCP has one Lok Sabha member, Sunil Tatkare, and two Rajya Sabha MPs - Praful Patel and Sunetra Pawar.

With NCP founder Sharad staying away from the public glare during the recently held local bodies and civic elections, his daughter and NCP (SP) Working President, Supriya Sule, campaigned for the party candidates, but was no match for her cousin Ajit, who campaigned statewide.



Apart from state NCP President Sunil Tatkare and national working president Praful Patel, the party lacks a senior leader capable of succeeding Ajit. The only other mass-based leader, Chhagan Bhujbal—recently acquitted in a money laundering case—is currently unwell.

While Patel and Tatkare have been key organisational figures, they lack the statewide grassroots connect that Ajit Pawar commanded.

In the ruling Mahayuti, which won a massive mandate in the 2024 assembly polls, the BJP has 132 MLAs, followed by Eknath Shinde- led Shiv Sena with 57 and Pawar's NCP 41.

Senior journalist Prakash Akolkar noted that both NCP factions are contesting the 5 February Zilla Parishad elections together on the 'clock' symbol, effectively signalling an unofficial merger.

"The question is no longer about who merges with whom. With only two Opposition parties left—Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT)—it remains to be seen whether the Congress can revive itself," he said.

In the recently-concluded civic polls in Maharashtra, the NCP, which contested separately from Mahayuti allies, bagged 167 seats across 29 municipal corporations and was defeated by the BJP on its home ground of Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad, where it had aligned with Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP), which won only 36 seats across the state.

In the 165-member Pune Municipal Corporation, the NCP won only 27 seats and NCP (SP) 3 seats against BJP's tally of 119, whereas in the 102-member Pimpri Chinchwad civic body, Ajit Pawar's party got 37 and Sharad Pawar's faction drew a blank, while BJP got 84 seats.

Last month, in the polls to 246 municipal councils and 42 nagar panchayats, the NCP won 966 and NCP (SP) 256 out of the 6,851 seats. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Ilhan Omar sprayed with unknown substance

MINNEAPOLIS, 28 JAN

US Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar was sprayed with an unknown substance at a Minneapolis town hall on Tuesday. Security and audience members restrained the suspect, Anthony Kazmierczak, 55, who was arrested and charged with third-degree assault. Police said he used a syringe containing a light-brown liquid, with a strong vinegar-like smell. The attack occurred shortly after Omar called for the abolition of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement and urged Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to resign following recent federal shootings in Minneapolis. Omar continued her speech and later said she was unharmed, stating, that she would not be intimidated. Leaders from both parties condemned the assault. —*PTI*

Ex S Korean first lady sentenced to 20 months

SEOUL, 28 JAN

A South Korean court on Wednesday sentenced former first lady Kim Keon Hee to 20 months in prison for receiving gifts from the Unification Church in exchange for business favours. The Seoul Central District Court acquitted her of stock price manipulation and political funding law violations, citing insufficient evidence. The sentence surprised observers after an independent counsel had sought 15 years for bribery and other charges. Kim, in custody since August, thanked the court but called the sentence "relatively high" and said her legal team would consider an appeal. The ruling comes weeks before the court delivers its verdict on ex-President Yoon Suk Yeol over his brief 2024 martial law imposition. —*PTI*

Mexico temporarily halts oil shipments to Cuba

MEXICO CITY, 28 JAN

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum on Tuesday confirmed that her government has at least temporarily halted oil shipments to Cuba, describing the move as a "sovereign decision" and simply part of routine fluctuations in supply. She emphasised that the state oil company, Pemex, acts independently and that the pause was not imposed by the United States. This is despite growing pressure from President Donald Trump to isolate Cuba. Mexico has long provided a crucial oil lifeline to Cuba, which faces severe energy shortages following the loss of Venezuelan supplies. Sheinbaum reiterated Mexico's continued solidarity with Havana. However, she did not specify what kind of support would continue. Analysts say Mexico is navigating a delicate balance between supporting Cuba and managing US relations. —*PTI*

Beloved Japanese pandas return to China permanently

BANGKOK, 28 JAN

Japan's last pair of pandas, Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei, have returned to China, leaving the country without the beloved bears for the first time in half a century. Their departure comes as diplomatic relations between Tokyo and Beijing reach a low point amid Japanese Prime Minister's stance on Taiwan, making it unlikely replacement pandas will be sent. The twin pandas, born at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo in 2021, had a devoted following, with thousands visiting the zoo ahead of their departure. China, which retains ownership of all pandas, first sent pandas to Japan in 1972 to mark normalised diplomatic ties. CCTV footage showed the pair arriving safely in Sichuan, where they will stay in quarantine. —*PTI*

Trump warns Iraq over returning former PM

Threatens to withdraw support over al-Maliki's ISIS ties

WASHINGTON/ IOWA, 28 JAN

United States President Donald Trump warned Iraq on Tuesday that the US would no longer support the country if Iraq's former prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, returns to power. "Last time Maliki was in power, the Country descended into poverty and total chaos." Trump said in a social media post on Tuesday, announcing his opposition to al-Maliki.

Trump made the threat days after the dominant political bloc known as the Coordination Framework, a collection of Shiite parties, announced it was backing the nomination of al-Maliki, who the US administration views as too close to Iran.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's bloc won the largest share of seats in November's parliamentary elections. But he stepped aside earlier this month after he was unable to form a government. That cleared the field for al-Maliki after the two had competed for the backing of the Coordination Framework.

Meanwhile, Trump reiterated his hard-line stance on Iran during a campaign-style event in Clive, Iowa, emphasising both military pressure and the possibility of negotiations with Tehran as tensions persist over the crackdown on protesters and regional security.

WIKIPEDIA

Iraq's former PM, Nouri al-Maliki

US President Donald Trump PTI

Pointing to a major US military buildup near Iran, Trump highlighted Washington's show of force while leaving room for diplomacy.

Trump said a "big armada," larger even than the one near Venezuela, was positioned close to Iran and claimed Tehran had repeatedly signalled a desire to negotiate, saying, "They want to make a deal." —*Agencies*

Saudi bars airspace, territory for strike on Iran amid US tension

RIYADH, 28 JAN

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said Tuesday that the Kingdom would not allow its airspace or territory to be used for military action against Iran, amid reports of a US naval buildup.

The Crown Prince made the remarks during a telephone conversation with the President of the Islamic Republic, Masoud Pezeshkian, who briefed him on recent developments in Iran, including the nuclear negotiations.

During the call, he stressed that Saudi Arabia respects Iran's sovereignty, would not allow attacks from its territory, and supports resolving disputes through dialogue to ensure regional stability.

This comes moments after United States President Donald Trump reiterated his hard-line stance on Iran during a campaign-style event in Iowa. Where he emphasised both military pressure and the possibility of negotiations with Tehran as tensions persist over the crackdown on protesters and regional security.

Pointing to a US military buildup in the Middle East, Trump said that there was a "armada floating beautifully toward Iran." —*ANI*

RUBIO DEFENDS TRUMP, WARNS VENEZUELA OF MILITARY FORCE

WASHINGTON, 28 JAN

Secretary of State Marco Rubio will warn on Wednesday that the Trump administration may take military action against Venezuela if its interim leader defies US expectations. In prepared testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Rubio says the US is not at war with Venezuela but would not rule out force. After a recent raid targeting Nicolás Maduro, he has

pleaded not guilty, protested his capture and declared himself president of his country. Congress hasn't curtailed Trump his acts on Venezuela. —*PTI*

UK PM Starmer visits China for the 1st time in 8 years

LONDON, 28 JAN

- Keir Starmer acknowledged tensions, including Beijing's crackdown in Hong Kong, support for Russia in Ukraine, and alleged Chinese espionage against UK officials, but stressed pragmatic engagement is in Britain's national interest.

"Like it or not, China matters to the UK," **British Prime Minister Keir Starmer** said ahead of his visit to Beijing on Wednesday, accompanied by a 60-strong business and cultural delegation.

The trip, which will also include Shanghai, reflects the UK government's "clear-eyed and realistic" approach to China, seeking cooperation while maintaining national security safeguards.

Starmer's visit, the first by a UK Prime Minister in eight years, follows the green light for Britain's new "mega embassy" in London.

He will meet President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang in Beijing to discuss trade, investment and security, before engaging with businesses in Shanghai.

Accompanied by major UK firms, including Tata Motors-owned Jaguar Land Rover, as well as cultural institutions, Starmer aims to expand access in financial services, creative industries and life sciences.

The UK emphasises China's role as the world's second-largest economy, a critical player in global supply chains and the UK's third-largest trading partner, supporting 370,000 British jobs.

Starmer acknowledged longstanding tensions, including Beijing's crackdown in Hong Kong, support for Russia in Ukraine, and alleged Chinese espionage against UK officials, but stressed pragmatic engagement is in Britain's national interest.

The visit also comes amid broader Western diplomacy with China, partly in response to unpredictability from the US under Donald Trump.

Starmer noted, "It doesn't make sense to stick our head in the sand."

Meanwhile, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney rejected claims he had softened remarks on China following a call with Trump, affirming that his statements at Davos on global power dynamics remain unchanged. —*PTI*

China, B'desh ink deal to set up drone production plant

—PTI

DHAKA, 28 JAN

Bangladesh on Tuesday inked a defence deal with China to set up a manufacturing facility for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), the interim government said.

The agreement was signed between the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) and the state-owned China Electronics Technology Group Corporation International (CETC), the defence ministry said in a statement.

As part of the deal, CETC will transfer technology to the BAF and support capacity-building to independently produce UAVs in the long term.

The UAVs will be used for humanitarian assistance and disaster management as well as military operations.

According to the statement, the BAF will initially acquire the capability to manufacture and assemble various types of Medium Altitude Low Endurance (MALE) UAVs and Vertical Take-off and Landing (VTOL) UAVs.

The agreement was signed at the BAF headquarters in Dhaka Cantonment in the presence of Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan and Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen.

China has been Bangladesh's primary supplier of defence hardware for decades.

The BAF is finalising a USD 2.2 billion deal in order to procure 20 Chengdu J-10C "Vigorous Dragon" multi-role fighter jets to enhance its capabilities. —*PTI*

New York's frigid cold claims 10 lives, raising questions about preparedness

NEW YORK, 28 JAN

At least 10 people have died from exposure to the bitter cold that has persisted in New York City since 23 January

One man was discovered under a layer of snow on a park bench in Queens, while another was found near a Manhattan hospital. Another was found beneath an elevated train line in the Bronx.

Their causes of death are still under investigation, but some showed signs of having succumbed to hypothermia. Several victims have been living on the streets. At least six of the fatalities came on as the temperature in the city fell to minus 13 degrees Celsius.

Strong winds kick up snow in Lowville, New York, on Friday. Several victims have been living on the streets —*PTI*

Mayor Zohran Mamdani said the city was adding additional homeless outreach workers, opening new warming centres and instructing hospitals to limit discharges "to ensure that people who have nowhere to go are kept indoors."

This prompted questions about whether Mamdani's administration could have done more to protect the city's most vulnerable residents ahead of the snowstorm that hit the city. —*PTI*

A drawing of Alex Pretti is seen amid tributes paid at the scene where he was fatally shot by an ICE officer —*PTI*

US government likely to shutdown over ICE

WASHINGTON DC, 28 JAN

The US government faces a partial shutdown from Saturday as Senate Democrats block a House-passed funding bill amid anger over the killing of ICU nurse Alex Pretti and Renée Good by federal agents in Minnesota.

US President Donald Trump said his administration would "de-escalate a little bit" its immigration operations in Minnesota after the second fatal shooting of a civilian by federal officers this month.

The incident involved ICU nurse Alex Pretti, who was killed in an encounter with Border Patrol agents. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem called Pretti a "domestic terrorist" and said he was "brandishing" a gun, while officials claim agents fired in self-defence.

A preliminary CBP report reviewing body-camera footage did not say Pretti reached for his firearm. A federal judge later blocked DHS from altering or destroying evidence.

Following the shooting, DHS removed Minnesota operation chief Gregory Bovino and deployed border czar Tom Homan, who met Governor Tim Walz, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, and law enforcement officials. Walz and Frey called for impartial investigations.

The scrutiny spread nationwide. In Arizona, agents wounded an alleged smuggler Patrick Gary Schlegel, after gunfire. In New York, dozens of protesters were arrested after occupying a Manhattan hotel lobby accused of housing immigration officers.

Senate leader Chuck Schumer vowed to oppose DHS funding if no deal emerges before Friday deadline. – *AGENCIES*

Federal Reserve meeting amid Trump pressure

Washington, 28 Jan: Reserve is holding its first Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting of 2026 from 27 to 28 January. After the meeting, the US Fed Chair, Jerome Powell, will announce the decision of the Fed on the benchmark interest rate. This FOMC meeting comes as the US Fed, remains under pressure from the Trump administration to cut interest rates. The Fed is expected to hold interest rates at 3.5 to 3.75 per cent, with no new policy projections. Trump has repeatedly flirted with firing Powell, whose term as Fed as governor is until 2028. – *Agencies*

Judge halts removal of 5-yr-old, father

San Antonio, 28 Jan: A US federal judge has temporarily barred the removal of a five-year-old Ecuadorian boy and his father, detained last week in Minnesota, pending court proceedings. Judge Fred Biery ordered that Liam Conejo Ramos and Adrian Alexander Conejo Arias not be removed or transferred. The case has intensified debate over immigration enforcement under the Trump administration. They are held in Texas. – *PTI*

AFGHAN BORDER TENSE

Thousands flee Pak fearing military ops

BARA, 28 JAN

More than 70,000 people, mostly women and children, have fled remote Tira in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province region in north-western Pakistan bordering Afghanistan amid fears of military operation against the Pakistani Taliban.

The residents and provincial authorities confirmed the development on Tuesday, though Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Mohammad Asif has denied the claim.

Speaking at a news conference in Islamabad, Asif said harsh weather, rather than military action, was driving the migration. His comments came weeks after residents started fleeing Tirah over fears of a possible army operation.

Mosque speakers urged residents to leave Tirah, Pakistan by 23 January to avoid potential fighting —*SCREENGRAB*

The exodus began a month after mosque loudspeakers urged residents to leave Tirah by 23 January to avoid potential fighting. Last August, Pakistan launched a military operation against Pakistani Taliban in the Bajaur district in the northwest, displacing hundreds of thousands of people.

Shafi Jan, a spokesman for the provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, posted on X that he held the federal government responsible for the ordeal of the displaced people, saying authorities in Islamabad were retracting their earlier position about the military operation.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CM Suhail Afridi, whose party is led by imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan, has criticised the military and said his government will not allow troops to launch a full-scale operation in Tirah.

The military says it will continue intelligence-based operations against Pakistani Taliban, who are known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP, emboldened since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in 2021. —*PTI*

Four killed in Russian drone attack on train

KYIV, 28 JAN

Russian drones hit a passenger train in the Kharkiv, Ukraine —*PTI*

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Wednesday denounced a Russian drone strike on a passenger train in Kharkiv, describing it as an "act of terrorism" that claimed four civilian lives.

The train, carrying over 200 passengers, was hit by three drones, with one carriage holding 18 passengers struck directly. Four people remain missing, and two others were injured. In a post on X, Zelenskyy emphasised that such attacks on civilian transport have no military justification and would be recognised globally as terrorism.

"There would be no doubt about the classification, neither in Europe, nor America, nor the Arab world, nor in China, nor anywhere else," he said. Zelenskyy called on the international community to hold Russia accountable, not just for individual strikes but for its expanding capacity to conduct such attacks.

He urged global unity to protect civilians and counter Russia's "progress in terror" through sanctions and support for Ukraine. Earlier, Russia carried out a separate drone attack on Odesa. —*ANI*

Rupee falls 31P, closes at 91.99 against USD

MUMBAI, 28 JAN

The rupee depreciated 31 paise to settle at 91.99 against the US dollar on Wednesday, touching the lowest closing level for the second time in less than a week. Forex traders said the rupee opened higher as the US dollar index softened and a long-awaited trade breakthrough with Europe offered quiet reassurance. However, increased month-end demand for the American currency and the ongoing geopolitical tensions dented investors' sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.60 and touched 91.50, but pared all the gains to touch a low of 91.99. On Tuesday, the rupee rebounded from its low levels and gained 22 paise to close at 91.68 against the US dollar. The dollar index, traded 0.07 per cent lower.—*PTI.*

Maruti Suzuki Q3 profit up by 4% at Rs 3,879 cr

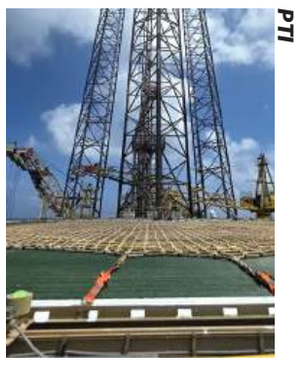
NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

Maruti Suzuki India on Wednesday posted 4 per cent increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 3,879 crore for the December quarter FY26, hit by one-time provision of Rs 594 crore on account of the new Labour Codes. The country's largest carmaker reported a net profit of Rs 3,727 crore for the October-December period last fiscal. Total revenue from operations rose to Rs 49,904 crore in the third quarter from Rs 38,764 crore in the year-ago period, the company said in a regulatory filing. The company clocked record total sales of 6,67,769 units, including exports of 1,03,100 units, the automaker stated. Domestic sales were at 14,35,945 units, while exports totalled 3,10,559 units. —*PTI*

Govt likely to expand startups definition: Official

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

The government is likely to expand the definition of startups to further strengthen the country's ecosystem for budding enterprises, an official said on Wednesday. The expanded definition would include deep-tech, cooperatives and allow startups to pivot to deep-tech, the official said. The government has taken a series of measures to promote the startup ecosystem in the country for boosting innovation. At present, over 2 lakh entities are registered as startups by the commerce and industry ministry —*PTI*



PTI

Cairn Oil & Gas announces gas discovery in Ambe

BETUL, 28 JAN

Cairn Oil & Gas, part of Vedanta Ltd, has found new natural gas reserves below the Ambe gas field in the western offshore area that it discovered many years ago, the company said on Wednesday. The discovery was made in appraisal well Ambe-2A in the CB/OSDSF/AMBE/2021 block and has been notified to the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons and the Oil Ministry, the firm said. "The discovery has been made in reservoirs, below the main gas field, within the Miocene-Tarkeshwar formation," it said without giving more details. The Ambe block, covering 728.19 square kilometres, was awarded to Cairn under the Discovered Small Field bidding round 3 in September 2022.—*PTI*

India-EU FTA to boost mgf & FDIs: Moody's

It will boost export of labour-intensive goods

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

The proposed India-EU free trade pact will be credit positive for India as lower tariffs and improved markets access are expected to support investment, exports and manufacturing, Moody Ratings said.

The pact would attract higher foreign investment, strengthen export competitiveness and boost labour intensive manufacturing sectors by improving access to European markets.

India and the EU on Wednesday announced the conclusion of negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), described as 'mother of all deals', under which 93 per cent of Indian shipments will enjoy duty-free access to the 27-nation bloc, while import of luxury cars and wines from the EU will become less expensive. The deal, concluded after negotiations spanning about two decades, will create a market of about 2 billion people across the world's fourth-largest economy, India, and the second-largest economic bloc, the EU.

The trade pact is expected to be formally signed and implemented this year.

The Free Trade Agreement was made after negotiations spanning about two decades, will be signed and implemented in 2026 —*PTI*

Moody's Ratings said lower tariffs on EU imports may also help ease costs, although such imports remain a smaller share of India's overall import bill.

The average tariffs of the EU on Indian goods are already low at around 3.8 per cent and will be reduced to 0.1 per cent under the deal.

On all these items, the EU will eliminate duties for India.

On the other hand, the EU will get duty-free access for over 90 per cent of its goods over a ten-year period in India.

The main EU goods that will get duty concessions include automobiles, wines, spirits, beer, olive oil and kiwis and pears among others. —*PTI*

STOCKS ADVANCE

Markets rally on optimism over India-EU FTA

MUMBAI, 28 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rallied for the second straight session on Wednesday, propelled by buying in industrial, energy and metal stocks amid renewed optimism on the global trade front following the landmark India-EU FTA.

Besides, gains in Bharat Electronics, Reliance Industries and Eternal stocks also supported equities, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 487.20 points, or 0.60 per cent, to settle at 82,344.68. During the day, it soared 646.49 points or 0.78 per cent to 82,503.97.

A total of 2,920 stocks advanced while 1,315 declined and 138 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 167.35 points or 0.66 per cent to end at 25,342.75.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Bharat Electronics surged nearly 9 per cent post its December quarter earnings. Eternal, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Trent, Mahindra &

Mahindra and UltraTech Cement were the other major gainers.

Asian Paints dropped over 4 per cent after the firm reported a decline of 4.83 per cent in consolidated net profit at Rs 1,073.92 crore for the December quarter of FY26.

Also, Maruti, Sun Pharma, Infosys and Bharti Airtel were major losers on the index.

Among sectoral indices, capital goods zoomed 5.32 per cent, oil & gas (3.94 per cent), industrials (3.51 per cent), energy (3.42 per cent), power (3.11 per cent), metal (2.08 per cent) and BSE utilities (2.01 per cent).

In contrast, FMCG and consumer durables were the laggards. —*PTI*

SHADOWFAX SHARES DROP OVER 9% ON MKT DEBUT

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

Shares of logistics services provider Shadowfax Technologies Ltd listed on Wednesday at a discount of over 9 per cent against the issue price of Rs 124. The stock started trading at Rs 113, down 8.87 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. At the NSE, the stock ended down 9.19 per cent.

The company's market valuation stood at Rs 6,706.35 crore. The Rs 1,907-crore initial public offering (IPO) of Shadowfax Technologies Ltd was subscribed by 2.72 times on the final day of bidding on Thursday last week. —*PTI*

ONGC, Reliance to share offshore assets

BETUL, 28 JAN

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd (ONGC) and Reliance Industries Ltd have signed an agreement to share resources used in finding and producing oil and gas.

Under the agreement, the companies will share facilities, drilling rigs, marine vessels (MSVs, tugs and PSVs), power infrastructure, pipelines, logging and well services, among others.

The two firms signed the agreement "to enable resource sharing for deepwater offshore exploration and production operations on India's East Coast, particularly across the Krishna Godavari (KG) basin and Andaman offshore" on the sidelines of India Energy Week (IEW), ONGC Director (Production) Pankaj Kumar said.

This marks a major step towards cost optimisation, faster execution, improved asset utilisation in complex deepwater projects and creating stronger synergies between India's largest oil and gas producer and the nation's biggest and most valuable company who have adjacent fields and operations, he said. —*PTI*

INDIA, SOUTH ASIA WILL NEED 3,300 PLANES: BOEING

HYDERABAD, 28 JAN

Airlines in India and South Asia will need nearly 3,300 new planes by 2044 as air traffic demand is on the rise, US aircraft maker Boeing said on Wednesday.

Single-aisle jets or the narrow-body planes will account for nearly 90 per cent of these projected deliveries at 2,875 while wide-body aircraft will be at 395.

In its Commercial Marker Outlook for South Asia, Boeing said airlines in the region would require about 45,000 pilots, 45,000 technicians and 51,000 cabin crew.

"India and South Asia's passenger air traffic will rise 7 per cent annually over the next 20 years spurred by a growing middle class, economic growth and airport and connectivity investments," Boeing managing director of Commercial Marketing, Eurasia and Indian Subcontinent Ashwin Naidu said.The Indian and South Asian region's fleet will grow from 795 to 2,925 planes.—*PTI*

REGULATORY BURDEN

Firms won't need licence for drug, clinical trial: Govt

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

With an aim to streamline pharmaceutical development, the Union Health Ministry has notified amendments to the New Drugs and Clinical Trials (NDCT) Rules, 2019.

Under the new regulations, pharmaceutical companies are not required to obtain a test licence for manufacturing drugs in small quantities for research and analysis, provided they submit an online intimation to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), except in certain cases.

The amendment will help reduce regulatory burden and promote ease of doing business.

This shift applies to non-commercial manufacture. However, a limited category of high-risk drugs, including cytotoxic drugs, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, will still require for-

mal licences.

The ministry expects this reform to save 90 days in the drug development life cycle. For categories where test licences continue to be applicable, the statutory processing timeline will be 45 days.

The CDSCO currently processes between 30,000 and 35,000 test licence applications annually.

Certain low-risk Bioavail ability/Bioequivalence (BA/BE) studies, which are crucial for the generic pharmaceutical, can now be initiated on the basis of a simple online intimation.

To ensure smooth and seamless implementation of these changes, dedicated online modules will be made available on the National Single Window System and the SUGAM portal, letting industry to submit intimations in a transparent manner. —*PTI*

SILVER PEAKS AT RS 3.85L/KG, GOLD AT RS 1.71L/10G

HYDERABAD, 28 JAN

Gold and silver prices showed no signs of cooling as both precious metals scaled fresh records in the national capital on Wednesday amid a weak US dollar and strong buying trends in global markets.

According to the marketmen, silver extended its gains for the third straight day by soaring Rs 15,000, or 4.05 per cent, to touch an all-time high of Rs 3,85,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes).

In the previous session, the white metal jumped sharply by Rs 40,500 to Rs 3,70,000 per kg, from Friday's close of Rs 3,29,500 per kg.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also climbed by Rs 5,000, or 3 per cent, to a fresh peak of Rs 1,71,000 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) in the bullion markets.

It settled at Rs 1,66,000 per 10g on Tuesday. —*PTI*

Amazon cuts 16,000 jobs in its latest round of layoffs

NEW YORK, 28 JAN

Amazon is cutting about 16,000 jobs in the latest round of mass layoffs for the tech industry.

Beth Galetti, a senior vice president at the e-commerce company, made the announcement Wednesday in a blog post.

The latest reductions follow a round of job cuts in October, when Amazon laid off 14,000 workers.

She said US-based staff would be given 90 days to look for a new role internally. Those who are unsuccessful or don't want a new job will be offered severance pay, outplacement services and health insurance benefits, she said.

"While we're making these changes, we'll also continue hiring and investing in strategic areas and functions that are critical to our future," Galetti said.

The layoffs are Amazon's biggest since 2023, when the company cut 27,000 jobs. Amazon's workforce doubled during the Covid-19 pandemic as millions stayed home and boosted online spending.

But in the following years, big tech and retail companies cut thousands of jobs to bring spending back in line. Hiring has stagnated in the US, and in December, the country added a meagre 50,000 jobs, nearly unchanged from a downwardly revised figure of 56,000 in November. —*PTI*

Adani-Embraer deal to see growth in 2 years: Naidu

HYDERABAD/ NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

Union Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu on Wednesday said the collaboration between the Adani Group and Brazilian major Embraer is expected to see good growth in the next two years.

The minister's comments came a day after Adani and Embraer on Tuesday announced a strategic collaboration that aims to have a final Assembly for regional transport aircraft in India.

Naidu who was speaking to media persons, also inaugurated a static display of aircraft at the four-day aviation summit Wings India 2026.

"India and Brazil, carry strong relationships, both at the bilateral level and international level. Next month, the president of Brazil will be meeting our prime minister and decide on timelines for how and when it is going to unfold," the minister said.

Meanwhile, Adani Electricity Mumbai Ltd has received a AAA credit rating, becoming India's first private power distribution company to achieve a rating on par with the sovereign, according to India Ratings.

"The rating upgrade reflects strong regulatory support, improving credit metrics and sustained deleveraging, supported by stable cash flows under a cost-plus regulatory framework," India Ratings said —*PTI*

IMMEDIATE IMPACT MUTED

Unrest in Iran has no impact on India's trade: Crisil

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

The ongoing civil and political unrest in Iran has not yet triggered a significant ripple effect on India Inc's global trade or the credit profiles of domestic companies.

According to a recent credit alert from Crisil Ratings, the immediate impact remains muted due to India's limited direct trade exposure to the nation. However, the rating agency warned that a prolonged or escalating conflict could eventually pressure specific sectors, particularly those sensitive to fluctuations in global crude oil prices.

The agency highlighted that India's direct trade with Iran is "minuscule," representing approximately 0.3 per cent of total exports and less than 0.1 per cent of total imports during the last fiscal year.

The impact is muted due to India's limited trade exposure to Iran —*PTI*

Most of India's exports to the region are concentrated in basmati rice, while imports largely consist of fruits and nuts.

Despite the low direct exposure, the broader risk lies in Iran's role in the global energy market. As Iran accounts for roughly 4-5 per cent of the world's crude oil supply, any disruption to its production could cause a spike in global prices.

Crisil cautioned that "if tensions persist or escalate, sectors such as oil refining, aviation and crude-linked sectors, such as speciality chemicals, paints, petrochemicals and synthetic textiles may be affected due to a rise in crude oil prices."

The impact on these industries will largely depend on their ability to pass on increased raw material costs to consumers. —*PTI*

CIGARETTE INDUSTRY TO CONTRACT VOLUME BY 6-8%, SAYS CRISIL

The domestic cigarette industry braces for a 6-8 per cent volume contraction, following the imposition of additional excise duties and an increase in GST rates, Crisil Ratings said. Currently, cigarettes are charged 28 per cent goods and services tax (GST), along with a varied compensation cess. From 1 February, the compensation cess will disappear, and an additional excise duty will be levied, based on the cigarettes' length. Mid to premium cigarettes (over 65 mm length) will be levied excise duty of Rs 3.6-8.5 per stick, while cigarettes in the mass segment (less than 65 mm length) will be levied Rs 2.05 - 2.1 per stick. GST will increase to 40 per cent. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

ICC T20I rankings: SKY climbs five spots to seventh

DUBAI, 28 JAN

India captain Suryakumar Yadav on Wednesday climbed five places to seventh in the ICC men's T20I rankings following a prolific run in the ongoing five-match home series against New Zealand, which India currently leads 3-0. The former No.1 batter struck scores of 32, 82 not out, and 57 not out to climb the table, as India dominate the upper reaches of the rankings with Abhishek Sharma at the summit and Tilak Varma in third position, just 10 days out from the T20 World Cup. Ishan Kishan, who hit 76 off 32 balls in the second match in Raipur, has re-entered the rankings in the 64th position, while Shivam Dubey (up nine places to 58th) and Rinku Singh (up 13 places to 68th) are among other batters to gain from the top-ranked T20I side.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@MOTOGP

MotoGP: Martin to miss pre-season test after surgeries

PARIS, 28 JAN

Former MotoGP champion Jorge Martin will miss the pre-season test in Sepang, Malaysia, as he continues to recover from surgeries last month, his team Aprilia said on Wednesday. Martin had a 2025 season to forget following his switch to Aprilia, suffering major injuries in a pre-season crash as well as one at the Qatar Grand Prix that ruled him out for several races. Last month, the Spaniard underwent two revision surgeries on his left wrist and right collarbone, with the 27-year-old yet to fully recover. "This decision is aimed at ensuring Martin's full recovery and peak physical condition ahead of the season opening," Aprilia said in a statement. "Martin will nevertheless be present in Malaysia with the team, closely following the team's work and the development of the RS-GP26."—*PTI*

Winter Olympics now set to have just 13 Russians

LAUSANNE, 28 JAN

A total of 13 Russian athletes are now set to compete as neutral individuals at the Milan Cortina Olympics after invitations from the IOC were confirmed Tuesday for Alpine skiers and lugers. Four years ago, the Russian team was more than 200 athletes at the 2022 Beijing Winter Games, which closed four days before Russia's full military invasion of Ukraine, which led to its exclusion from much of international sports. Seven Belarusian athletes have now been invited to the Winter Games that open next week on 6 Feb.—*PTI*

We'll play an exciting brand of football: Coyle

JAMSHEDPUR, 28 JAN

As Jamshedpur FC began their Indian Super League (ISL) preparations, head coach Owen Coyle has outlined his vision on Wednesday of an attacking and entertaining style of football. Coyle said the aim is to play a brand of football that connects with the supporters. "We will be playing, obviously, as we want to do, a fast, exciting brand of football. But one that's very enjoyable, one that's pleasing on the eye, and one that ultimately, one that's exciting," Coyle said. The gaffer was full of praise for the current squad and made it clear that he aims to go beyond results alone.—*PTI*

Djokovic reaches SFs after Musetti retires injured

Sinner, Rybakina, and Pegula also reach semifinals

MELBOURNE, 28 JAN

Novak Djokovic advanced to the semifinals of the Australian Open after a lucky escape in Melbourne on Wednesday.

Djokovic, the 10-time champion, trailed fifth-seeded Italian Lorenzo Musetti by two-sets-to-love. The 38-year-old Serbian was ahead 3-1 in the third set when Musetti was forced to retire due to an injury.

As a result, Djokovic also broke Roger Federer's record (102) of most wins by a man at the Melbourne Major in the Open Era.

Djokovic will take on two-time reigning champion Jannik Sinner in a repeat of the 2024 semifinals. Second-seeded Italian Sinner defeated eighth-seeded American Ben Shelton in straight sets in the last men's quarterfinal.

Elena Rybakina ended second-seeded Pole Iga Swiatek's bid for a Career Grand Slam as the fifth-seeded Kazakh won 7-5, 6-1 to set up a semifinal clash against sixth-seeded American Jessica Pegula, who knocked out fourth-seeded compatriot Amanda Anisimova 6-2, 7-6(1).

Fifth seed Elena Rybakina booked her place in the Australian Open semifinals on Wednesday with a dominant second set display to hand six-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek a 7-5, 6-1 defeat at Melbourne Park.

Amanda Anisimova said she will "lose her mind" for a couple of days after suffering defeat in her Australian Open quarter-final on Wednesday to fellow American Jessica Pegula. The 24-year-old Anisimova's hopes of a third Grand Slam final in a row imploded in a blur of unforced errors and with several angry shows of frustration.

Sixth-seeded Pegula beat the fourth seed 6-2, 7-6 (7/1) in Melbourne, and Anisimova admitted her opponent was "playing great tennis. She's always playing stable". But Anisimova was annoyed with herself too, as she totted up 44 unforced errors to Pegula's 21 and made seven double faults. At one moment in the second set, she had her head in her hands as the match slipped away.

Novak Djokovic claps as Lorenzo Musetti walks off the court -*PTI*

Iga: Are we tennis players, or animals in the zoo?

Iga Swiatek picked up a theme that Coco Gauff left the Australian Open with after the 21-year-old American's racket-smashing, frustration-releasing moments away from the court went viral.

Gauff said a "conversation needs to hbe ad" about the seemingly limitless access-all-areas cameras that track players from the locker room to the court and just about everywhere in between.

After her 7-5, 6-1 quarterfinal loss to fifth-seeded Elena Rybakina on Wednesday, Swiatek was asked how she feels about the lack of off-camera areas for the players and what she thinks should be the balance between entertainment, constant content, and player privacy. —*PTI*

WPL FINAL BERTH

RCB look to make amends against depleted Warriorz

VADODARA, 28 JAN

Table-toppers Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look to make amends with the bat after two consecutive defeats and lock their berth in the final when they take on a depleted UP Warriorz in the Women's Premier League, here on Thursday.

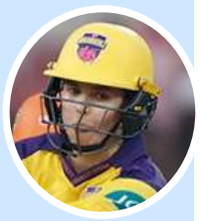
RCB (10 points) is the only team confirmed for the WPL playoffs so far, and a victory over UPW will seal a top-two finish in the points table along with a berth in the final.

On their part, facing an uphill task to remain in playoff contention, UPW have been rocked by an injury to their leading run-getter, Phoebe Litchfield (243 runs). Amy Jones has been named the replacement.

There's still work to be done for the Smriti Mandhana-led side, who notched up five wins on the trot to emerge head and shoulders above the rest, but two defeats since have indeed jolted their campaign.The match starts at 7.30 pm. —*PTI*

Amy Jones replaces injured Litchfield

UP Warriorz on Wednesday picked England wicketkeeper-batter Amy Jones as a replacement for injured Phoebe Litchfield for the remainder of the Women's Premier League.



Litchfield, who is the team's leading run-getter, has been ruled out of the tournament due to injury in big blow to UPW's playoff hopes ahead of their clash against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Thursday.

Australia arrives in Pakistan for three-match T20I series

LAHORE, 28 JAN

Australia squad led by Mitchell Marsh arrived in Lahore here on Wednesday to play in a three-match T20I series, even as confusion prevails over Pakistan's participation in next month's T20 World Cup.

The series has been seen as Pakistan's final preparatory step for the T20 World Cup, but it remains to be seen if the national team will get the government's nod to take part in the tournament starting on February 7.

Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Mohsin Naqvi, after a meeting with Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, had conveyed that all options were on the table the decision will be taken by either Friday or next Monday.

Pakistan has been protesting ICC's decision to replace Bangladesh with Scotland after the Bangladesh Cricket Board and interim government insisted they would not play T20 World Cup matches in India over security concerns. Pakistan, meanwhile, announced its squad for the 20-team tournament, which is, with one exception, the same squad that will face off against Australia.

Australia arrive in Pakistan on Wednesday ahead of the T20 World Cup -*PCB*

The selectors have dropped pacer Muhammad Wasim Jr from the squad for the World Cup, but he will be available for the series against Australia. Australia has reached Lahore without some of their experienced player,s including Pat Cummins.

Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Glenn Maxwell, Tim David, and Nathan Ellis have all been rested for the Pakistan series to recover completely from injuries before the WC.

But the Australian squad, in Pakistan for the first time after mid 2022, is still strong with Travis Head, Cameron Green, and Josh Inglis among those who featured in the Ashes.

Australia squad: Mitch Marsh (c), Sean Abbott, Xavier Bartlett, Mahli Beardman, Cooper Connolly, Ben Dwarshuis, Jack Edwards, Cameron Green, Travis Head, Josh Inglis (wk), Matthew Kuhnemann, Mitch Owen, Josh Philippe (wk), Matthew Renshaw, Matt Short, Marcus Stonis, Adam Zampa. —*PTI*

TATA STEEL MASTERS

Gukesh loses; Pragg beats Chithambaram to secure first win

WIJK AAN ZEE, 28 JAN

World Champion D Gukesh suffered yet another defeat in the Tata Steel Masters, this time against Matthias Bluebaum of Germany in the ninth round, while Arjun Erigaisi was forced to settle for a quick draw with Hans Moke Niemann ofthe United States. Meanwhile, Pragg nanandhaa ended his victory drought by beating fellow Indian Aravindh Chithambaram, while Arjun Erigaisi drew with Hans Niemann.

World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov played out a draw with sole leader and Uzbek compatriot Nodirbek Abdusattorov, leaving the latter still in command on six points. Sindarov was joined in the second spot by Jorden van Foreest of Holland on 5.5 points, along with Yagiz Kaan Ergodmus of Turkey. The trio is followed by Niemann with four rounds still to come in the event.

Playing the King pawn game, Gukesh tried the Bishop's opening that has not been very popular of late in elite-level tournaments. —*PTI*

Chennaiyin ropes in Spanish maestro Alberto

CHENNAI, 28 JAN

Chennaiyin FC on Wednesday completed the signing of Spanish midfielder Alberto Noguera, with the Madrid-born playmaker penning a contract until the end of the season to become the Marina Machans' second new addition ahead of the upcoming Indian Super League.

With nearly 400 career appearances, Noguera brings considerable experience and pedigree to Chennaiyin FC, having enjoyed a long and successful career across Spain, England, Azerbaijan, and India.

Over the years, he has established himself as a proven performer at the highest level in India, having represented FC Goa, Mumbai City FC, and Bengaluru FC.

Comfortable operating across attacking and central midfield roles, Noguera adds creativity, composure, and control in the middle of the pitch. —*PTI*

US women earn fifth shutout with 5-0 win over Chile

SANTA BARBARA, 28 JAN

Croix Bethune, Jameese Joseph, and Emily Sams all scored their first international goals, and the United States went on to beat Chile 5-0 on Tuesday night.

Emma Sears and Trinity Rodman also scored for the United States, which hasn't conceded a goal in five matches.

Coach Emma Hayes went with a completely different starting lineup in the match at UC Santa Barbara than the one she used on Saturday for the team's 6-0 victory over Paraguay in Carson, California. Players on the roster averaged 5.2 national team appearances, the fewest for a lineup since 2001.

"I think in both games, the team, regardless of its inexperience as a collective, regardless of the connections that are there because they haven't played together before, I think they showed an awful lot of maturity in the performance, and that's all I can ask from them," Hayes said. —*PTI*

B'desh shooters to travel to India for Asian C'ships, confirms NRAI

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

The Bangladesh government has approved its shooters to travel to India for next month's Asian Rifle and Pistol Championships, days after refusing to send its national cricket team to the country to participate in the upcoming T20 World Cup due to security concerns.

While the T20 showpiece will be held in venues across India and Sri Lanka from February 7 to March 8, the shooting event will take place at the Dr Karni Singh Range here from February 2 to 14, with 17 countries sending more than 300 shooters. Bangladesh will field two rifle shooters, who will compete in a total of three events.There had been speculation that after Bangladesh pulled out of the global T20 cricket tournament, its shooting team might also withdraw over "security concerns". However, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) told PTI on Wednesday that the players from the neighbouring country are set to compete. "So far, there is no news that the Bangladesh team is not coming. Their team is coming, no doubt about it," said NRAI secretary Rajiv Bhatia. "We at NRAI are in regular touch with them (Bangladesh federation officials). —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

SCANDAL OVER NATURALISED PLAYERS

Malaysian soccer association committee quits

KUALA LUMPUR, 28 JAN

The entire executive committee of the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) resigned Wednesday after a scandal involving the naturalization of seven foreign-born players led to FIFA sanctions, a court appeal, and intensified scrutiny of the country's soccer governance.

All committee members, elected 11 months ago for the 2025–2029 term, stepped down with immediate effect in a unanimous and voluntary decision in order to protect the association's credibility. The mass resignation followed FIFA's decision last September to fine the association about $450,000 and suspend the seven players for a year after determining that fake documents had been filed to support their naturalization. The players Facundo Garcés, Rodrigo Holgado, Imanol Machuca, João Figueiredo, Gabriel Palmero, Jon Irazabal, and Héctor Hevel were also fined individually.

Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) acting president Mohd Yusoff Mahadi speaks during a joint press conference -*PTI*

The seven, who originate from Argentina, Brazil, the Netherlands, and Spain, went on to play for Malaysia, including in a qualifying match for the 2027 Asian Cup that Malaysia won against Vietnam.

Malaysian officials had maintained that all seven players were eligible under FIFA rules because each had a grandparent born in Malaysia. FIFA, however, said its investigators obtained original documents from the players' countries of origin that contradicted those claims. —*PTI*

Leipzig settles for a draw as Hoffenheim wins

BERLIN, 28 JAN

Martijn Kaars scored a stoppage-time penalty for St. Pauli to deny Leipzig all three points with a 1-1 draw in their weather-delayed Bundesliga match on Tuesday.

Leipzig defender David Raum slipped at an inopportune time as he missed the ball and took down Kaars to concede the spot kick.

Hoffenheim consolidated third place with a 2-0 win at Werder Bremen despite finishing with 10 men

Leipzig goalkeeper Péter Gulácsi got his fingers to the ball but couldn't keep Kaars' well-struck effort out, and the home team celebrated as if it had won.

It was St. Pauli's second consecutive point after the derby draw against Hamburger SV, and it lifted it a point above the bottom side Heidenheim with 15 rounds to play.

Leipzig still moved to fourth, the last qualification spot for the lucrative Champions League, ahead of Stuttgart on goal difference. —*PTI*